ORE VIDAL SPEAKS

The Nation.

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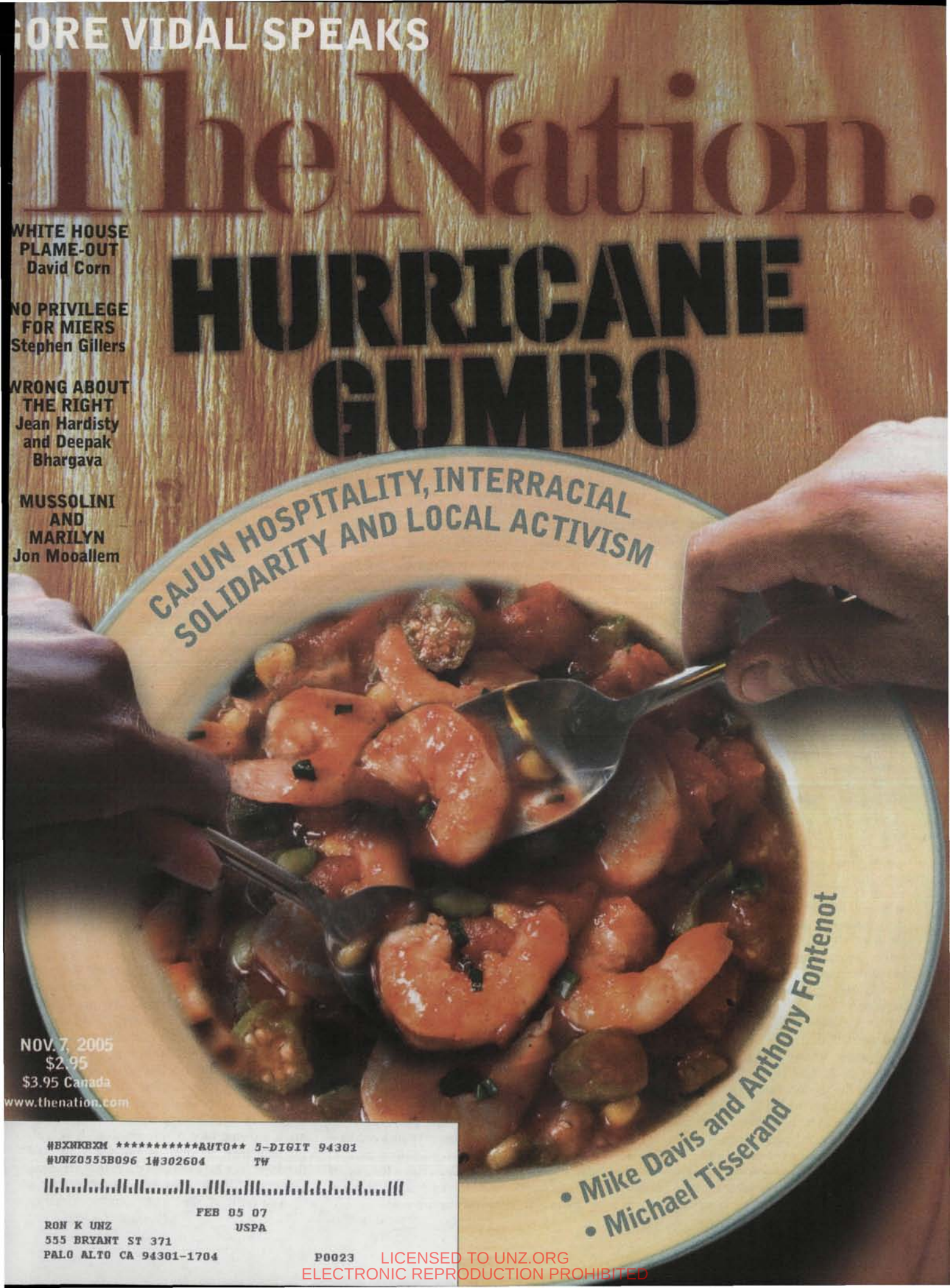
CAJUN HOSPITALITY, INTERRACIAL SOLIDARITY AND LOCAL ACTIVISM



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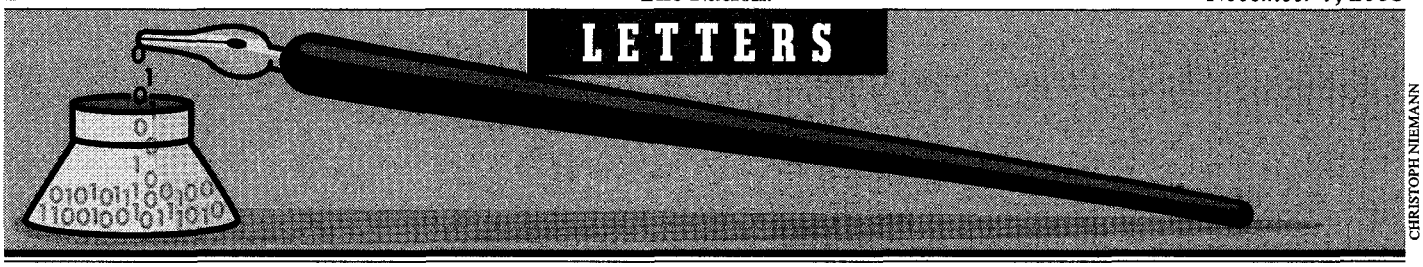

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

LYNNDIE ENGLAND, READ THIS

Cambridge, Mass.

■ Alexander Cockburn persists in lying about me. In his October 17 "Beat the Devil" column, "From Lynndie England to Shaquille O'Neal," Cockburn falsely claims that I have "clamored for torture." Cockburn knows full well that I "clamored" for just the opposite. As I wrote in my essay "Tortured Reasoning," which appeared in Sanford Levinson's book on torture, "I am against torture as a normative matter, and I would like to see its use minimized. I pose the issue as follows. If torture is, in fact, being used and/or would, in fact, be used in an actual ticking bomb terrorist case, would it be normatively better or worse to have such torture regulated by some kind of warrant, with accountability, recordkeeping, standards and limitations?"

What I called for would have prevented precisely the sorts of claims that England made in her defense. Referring directly to Abu Ghraib, I conclude that "if a warrant requirement of some kind had been in place, the low-ranking officers on the ground could not plausibly claim that they had been subtly (or secretly) authorized to do what they did, since the only acceptable form of authorization would be in writing. Nor could the high-ranking officials hide behind plausible deniability, since they would have been required to give the explicit authorization."

This is surely different from clamoring for torture. Cockburn's false personal potshots cheapen *The Nation*'s discourse and diminish its credibility. ALAN DERSHOWITZ

COCKBURN REPLIES

Olympia, Wash.

■ As regards Dershowitz's clamors for torture, lying is not necessary. The record suffices. Amid the post-9/11 debate about which bits of the Bill of Rights and the Geneva Conventions to heave overboard, there issued from the Felix Frankfurter Professor at Harvard Law School the widely publicized message that it's OK to use torture, so long as the torturers shoving a "sterilized needle" (the prof's preferred instrument) under their victims' fingernails have some sort of warrant in their pockets. So, at that fraught moment Dershowitz called for regulated torture, which, contrary to his claims here, sought to make the outrageous normative, subject to rules, procedures, record-keeping and so forth.

Thus poisoning the well with this decorous prattle, Dershowitz was worse, in my view, than those who bellowed coarsely, "They're barbarians, we have to be too!" That latter idea bothers ordinary people, especially when they imagine their own sons and daughters thus launched into executive barbarism.

In fact, there was a "warrant requirement" of sorts at Abu Ghraib. It's just that no one could remember what it was. The soldiers who'd been in Guantánamo and Afghanistan could not remember that though they did not have to abide by Geneva Conventions, according to Bush's February 7, 2002, directive and Gonzales's legal opinion re prisoners taken in the "global war on terror," they did have to apply Geneva to Iraqi prisoners. The existence of widespread "confusion" is stated plainly in the Fay Report. Beyond that, Donald Rumsfeld drew up a list of approved interrogation procedures for Gitmo on December 2, 2002. Six weeks later he rescinded those orders, still allowing some of the procedures, which would be considered cruel and degrading treatment—torture—if you were on the receiving end. According to the Army's own investigations, soldiers aware of the first list (or warrant) were not always aware that it was later rescinded.

When those soldiers went to Iraq they carried their confusion with them. In any event, on September 14, 2003—following a visit to Abu Ghraib by Gen. Geoffrey Miller and a team from Gitmo, there to evaluate the military's "ability to rapidly exploit internees for actionable intelligence" and make recommendations for same—Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, then head of ground forces in Iraq, signed a policy outlining interrogation techniques that was very close to Rumsfeld's original list. Some of the techniques required specific approval from Sanchez before use (another version of a warrant), and such requests were either made or they weren't (because of more confusion), but the existence of those procedures, limitations and record-keeping did not prevent torture. It merely normalized it.

At the time of the Abu-Ghraib pictures there were anywhere from 6,000 to 10,000 prisoners there, and other detainees all over Iraq. Abuse has been reported everywhere, most recently in the allegations by Capt. Ian Fishback to Human Rights Watch and the Senate Armed Services Committee. Everywhere there were mortar attacks, chaos, fear, suspicion and soldiers short-handed, ill equipped or bloody-minded, sometimes all of the above. The notion of applying judicious consideration under such conditions re whom and how to torture would be absurd if it were not already immoral and grotesque. Dershowitz's faith that higher-ups would actually put their names to such orders—rather than making their intentions clear in other ways—would, to plagiarize a Russian of vigorous views, be touching in a child but is repulsive in a person of mature years.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

STILL BREAD, STILL ROSES

Worcester, Mass.

■ Brother Foner is on target when he notes that the children of the Lawrence textile mill workers in the strike of 1912 brought such sympathy to the strikers that they gained great public support ["Bread, Roses and the Flood," Oct. 3]. They were joined in the public mind with the 1911 victims of the Triangle Fire and 1909–10 heroines of the Great Uprising of the 20,000 New York shirtwaist workers, who won a union for garment workers.

Alas, our legendary memory of the Lawrence "Bread and Roses" strike to which Eric Foner refers needs correction. The slogan, in relation to that particular strike, is a constructed memory. James Oppenheimer's poem "Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes/Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread and give us roses" has been traced by Jim Zwick to 1911—the year before the strike. No authoritative document or photo has been found with the slogan at that strike.

Yet the slogan is "correct." Of course the great struggles by working people have been for material decency and for social enfranchisement; and of course Foner is on the right track: The New Orleans flood may open, as did the Lawrence strike, the hearts and minds of a broad public to the issues of social justice. But "Bread and Roses" was not a slogan of the Lawrence strike. ROBERT J.S. ROSS, *author*
Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops

PRO-FUSION OR CON-FUSION?

Boston

■ Alyssa Katz's "The Power of Fusion Politics" [Sept. 12] on the Working Families Party's strategy is the kind of discussion of tactical questions we love to see. I do, however, have to clarify my reasons for "balking" at fusion for Massachusetts. The isolated quote suggests I think we already have the legislature we want. I was pointing out that our labor-community coalition, the Working Family Agenda (WFA), has won the same kind of significant victories here without fusion that our colleagues at the WFP have won in New York (e.g., a $6.75 minimum wage, a billion-dollar tax increase on the wealthy). And we won them the way the WFP did: with an electoral strategy that leverages the support of right-leaning legislators while electing a growing bloc of progressives. It is both the similarity between us and the WFP and the difference between our states that make me skeptical of the strategy for Massachusetts.

The WFP has shown that a ballot-line strat-

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EDITORIALS

Pyrrhic Victory in Iraq

The approval of the Iraqi Constitution in the October 15 referendum is another Pyrrhic victory for the Bush Administration in its effort to salvage its failed Iraq project. Like the January election and the other so-called democratic landmarks before it, the ratification of the Constitution may momentarily slow the erosion of domestic US support for the occupation. But also like the January election, the Constitution is almost certain to exacerbate sectarian divisions in Iraq while doing little or nothing to undermine popular support for the insurgency.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has taken the lead in spinning the outcome of the vote, arguing that the referendum has brought the Sunnis into the political process and suggesting that the Constitution now provides an accepted legal framework for governing Iraq. But evidence on the ground rebuts these claims. By international standards, the process for drafting and approving the Constitution was flawed from the beginning. In part because they boycotted the January election, the Sunnis, who make up about 20 percent of the population, were badly underrepresented in the National Assembly and thus were largely frozen out of the decision-making. Not surprisingly, the document reflected Shiite and Kurdish domination of the government, especially on questions relating to the federal structure of the country. Last-minute amendments, reportedly engineered by US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, including limits on de-Baathification, did soften some of the more offensive parts of the Constitution but did not alter the features most unacceptable to the Sunni minority other than to permit further revisions after the December elections. That's why they took part in the vote—not, as Rice implied, to approve the political process but to register their profound disagreement with the Constitution and Shiite dominance.

The underlying cause of Sunni rejection remains the issue of federalism and the desire of the Shiites and Kurds for regional autonomy. The Constitution would permit the establishment of a highly autonomous nine-province region for the predominantly Shiite south as well as a three-province Kurdish region in the north. Many Sunnis, along with Shiite nationalists loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, oppose such a loose federal structure because it would severely weaken the central government and exclude them from a share in Iraq's oil resources, which lie in the southern and northern parts of the country.

There is also the sensitive issue of the role of Islam. The Constitution declares Islam to be a primary source of legislation and calls for the appointment of experts in Sharia (Islamic law) to the Supreme Federal Court; this has sparked concerns among women and among Iraqis who favor a secular state. Moreover, the Constitution does not address the most explosive issue of all—the presence of foreign troops and foreign bases on Iraqi soil—and tacitly accepts many of the laws relating to the privatization of Iraqi industry imposed on the country by the Coalition Provisional Authority in the first days of the occupation. Occupation and the privatization of industry are anathema to most Iraqis.

Given the country's internal divisions, the overall effect of the referendum's approval may be to accelerate Iraq's "descent into civil war and disintegration," as the International Crisis Group warned before the vote. That outcome is even more likely if the

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charges of fraud and ballot-stuffing lodged against the Shiite-dominated government are shown to be true. In short, rather than bringing more Sunnis into the process, the ratification of the Constitution, along with widespread accusations of fraud perpetrated by the Shiite-led government, could fuel more Sunni anger and disenchantment, prompting more support for the insurgency.

Even more worrying, there is growing evidence that Iraqis are losing patience with the "democratic" process as well as with the occupation. As recent interviews by various journalists have shown, Iraqis are increasingly angry at the growing corruption, the lack of electricity and water, and the widespread anarchy. They blame the current government and, above all, the US occupation for this deplorable state of affairs. For these Iraqis the Constitution is at best irrelevant and at worst just another US-imposed measure that will only increase the violence and make the country's problems more unmanageable. The only democratic landmark that really matters to them—the only one capable of reversing the spiral into more chaos and war, the only one that would create the conditions for real compromise—is an end to the occupation. Yet this is the one step the Bush Administration is unwilling to consider. Until it does, there is little hope that the deepening violence in Iraq will end.

COMMENT

White House Plame-Out

In one (very limited) respect, indictments do not matter in the Plame/CIA leak case. Special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald's probe has already revealed that Bush aides—including Karl Rove, the President's *über*-strategist, and Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Dick Cheney's chief of staff—engaged in wrongdoing that violated Bush's purported standards and that the White House did not tell the public the truth about its participation in the leak that outed former Ambassador Joseph Wilson's wife, Valerie Wilson (sometimes known by her maiden name, Valerie Plame), as an undercover CIA officer. At the least, the Administration's leak, which appeared in a July 14, 2003, Bob Novak column, ruined the career and perhaps the operations of a covert public servant who had spent years working to thwart the spread of weapons of mass destruction; it may also have threatened other CIA operatives, assets and front groups involved in anti-WMD endeavors. (The post-leak damage assessment presumably conducted by the CIA has not been leaked.) And despite the claims of Rove's attorney that a kindly Rove was merely trying to help journalists report the Joe Wilson story accurately, the leak occurred when the White House was worried that Wilson—who after a secret trip to Niger for the CIA dismissed allegations that Iraq had been seeking weapons-grade uranium there—was a threat to Bush's justification for the invasion of Iraq. The bottom line: White House aides jeopardized national security in order to undermine a critic.

Over the past two years Bush backers have tried to distract the public from the facts of the case. They have attacked Joseph Wilson for being a—yikes!—Democrat. (Wilson, a career foreign serv-

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COMMENT

ice officer, contributed to Bush's campaign during the 2000 GOP primaries, to his later regret.) They have claimed that Valerie Wilson was not really undercover. (The CIA has indicated she was.) Some have dismissed the Fitzgerald investigation as yet another desperate act engineered by a hapless Democratic Party with no new ideas. (Fitzgerald, a career prosecutor without a known partisan bent, was appointed by the Ashcroft Justice Department.) A few right-wingers have even accused me of being the first journalist to expose Valerie Wilson's undercover status. (This conspiracy theory is too convoluted and ridiculous to explicate and debunk here.) And some have revived the argument Reaganites deployed during the Iran/*contra* scandal: that the case criminalizes policy differences. (Are Fitzgerald and the judges who have overseen his probe motivated by policy disagreements with Bush?)

Legal or not, the Plame leak was wrong. And thanks to Fitzgerald's efforts, it's now known that Rove discussed Valerie Wilson's CIA employment status—which was classified—with at least two reporters (Novak and *Time*'s Matt Cooper) and that Libby did the same with two journalists (Cooper and the *New York Times*'s Judith Miller). The leak was either a deliberate and malicious act or a careless one in which spin-driven officials cavalierly spread sensitive information without checking to see if it was classified. The disclosures about Rove and Libby prove that the White House misled the public when it claimed in 2003 that neither man was "involved" in the leak. (Rove apparently confirmed the leak for Novak.) These revelations also show that Bush was not serious when he said then that he would take "appropriate action" against any official who "leaked classified information." It's now clear that Rove and Libby did leak such information. Hiding behind the excuse that Fitzgerald's probe was still under way, Bush in recent months has refused to explain his position or say anything about the conduct of his underlings. He did shift his standards in July, when he declared that only an aide convicted of a crime would be booted—a statement out of sync with his 2000 campaign vow to change the culture of Washington: "In my Administration, we will ask not only what is legal but what is right, not what the lawyers allow but what the public deserves."

The Plame case has not only illuminated the slippery morals of the Bush crowd and the hypocrisy of right-wing "patriots" willing to sacrifice Valerie Wilson and her work to protect the White House. It also—without indictments—exposed profound troubles at the *Times*. The curious case of reporter Judith Miller—not adequately explained in the paper's recent articles—raises disturbing questions about the *Times*. How could the *Times* have allowed Miller, whose errant reporting on Iraq's nonexistent WMDs greased the path to war, to operate without standard editorial supervision, especially when she cut a deal with Libby to misleadingly characterize him as an anonymous "former Hill staffer" to camouflage the attack on Joseph Wilson? This violated *Times* policy on anonymous sourcing. Where's the disciplinary action? And why did the paper not explain how Miller came to obtain a security clearance from the Administration she was tasked to cover? Also, how is it possible that Miller cannot recall which sources had told her about Valerie Plame, days before Plame was outed and became big news? She is now severely tainted, and the paper has not remedied the problems she has caused it.

Indictments aside, the Plame case has discredited the White House. Bush aides self-servingly leaked information that potentially damaged the nation. And then the White House, and perhaps Bush himself, lied to the public about it. One doesn't need indictments—or convictions—to see this case as a clear representation of the way Bush and his crew do business. DAVID CORN

No Privilege for Miers

The nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court gives the Senate Judiciary Committee a chance to redeem itself after conducting a Potemkin village version of advise and consent in its hearings on the nomination of John Roberts to be Chief Justice.

In the Roberts hearings the committee timidly accepted vague answers that told it little about the nominee's views on constitutional questions, and it deferred without a whimper to the White House claim of privilege for memorandums Roberts had written as deputy solicitor general. Those memos would have provided the best evidence of Roberts's views, because they were relatively recent and because as deputy he was instrumental in fashioning the government's position before the Supreme Court. After this disappointment we can be excused for wondering if the committee envisions its role as anything more than to weed out the occasional G. Harrold Carswell or Robert Bork. Such passivity is no longer tolerable. It's a different Court today with a different docket.

Now comes the Miers nomination and a new chance for the senators on the committee to do their constitutional duty. The best evidence of Miers's views on the federal statutory and constitutional issues likely to come before the Supreme Court resides in her advice to the Administration these past five years. Roberts at least had something of a paper trail beyond his memos in the Solicitor General's office. Miers has no trail apart from her job in the White House. The White House has signaled its intention not to disclose her advice, citing executive and attorney-client privi-

CALVIN TRILLIN

ONE POSSIBLE SCENARIO

The gang of right-wing-dogma verifiers
Continues in its dissing of Ms. Miers,
And hints her views don't differ much from Breyer's.
The intellectual right says George Bush hires
Just hacks who act as ego fortifiers.
Then Bush, attacking all of his decriers,
Calls whingeing neocons, in Yiddish, *shreiers*,
And then calls Will and Brooks and Kristol liars.
So they call him a dope—no qualifiers.
O'Connor reconsiders, unretires.

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COMMENT

lege. Judiciary Committee chair Arlen Specter seems to agree. If that view prevails the hearings will be a seminar on constitutional law, with the nominee merely needing to prove she can pass, as she undoubtedly will. Constitutional law is not all that hard.

While it is difficult to judge the validity of any privilege claim without more information, probably most and possibly all of what Miers told Administration officials is in fact privileged under one theory or another. So what? The fact that information is privileged does not make disclosing it illegal. Privileges are waived every day, because clients conclude that it is in their interest to do so. This can happen, for example, if a company decides to reveal communications with its lawyers in order to persuade regulators that it has not misbehaved or that it has put its house in order.

Waiver does carry two risks for the White House. Waiving the privilege for one purpose can lead to loss of it elsewhere. So the President may fear that if he shares specific advice from Miers, the government will lose its claim of privilege if others want to use the same information in court. Second, premature disclosure of advice may compromise domestic or foreign policies currently under discussion but not yet implemented. However, neither risk justifies categorical refusal to waive privilege for all of Miers's advice since January 2001. Surely she has done much in five years at the White House that can be shared with no danger to the government.

At the very least, the senators must demand all of Miers's advice to the Administration. If the White House wants to withhold particular items, the committee should require it to justify its position. If the Administration stonewalls, the senators must stare it down, not buckle. It is an insult to the Senate and the nation for Bush to say that Miers is the best possible choice for the Court, or even a worthy one, and then cavalierly block discovery of the very information that supposedly supports this claim. This is not a partisan issue. It's about the Senate's institutional integrity—indeed, its constitutional relevance. Regardless of who is President and who the nominee, the question is whether the Senate will demand the respect to which the Constitution entitles it or choose instead to stage the confirmation equivalent of a show trial, where everyone gets a chance to look tough and smart for the cameras but the verdict is scripted in advance. STEPHEN GILLERS

Stephen Gillers is a law professor at New York University.

Robbing the Poor

Remember when the President had the revelation that there were poor people in this country and announced that "we have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action"? Well, the latest response some Republicans have mustered on behalf of the poor in the wake of the hurricane is indeed bold: blaming aid to the poor for poverty itself. That's right, as these clever conservatives tell it, the poor people you saw on TV and Bush glimpsed in his "disaster highlights" DVD have food stamps, Medicaid and welfare to thank for their situation. The problem with such aid, according to this logic, is that it creates dependence. Consider those in Louisiana, where welfare benefits averaged less than $240 per month last year, who didn't have the cash to buy a bus ticket out because the storm hit after their benefits checks ran out. Way too dependent, according to these Republicans. Their solution? Slash benefits further.

Even before the storm—as the Census was coming out with the news that there were a million new poor people in the country, that household incomes failed to increase for the fifth straight year and that income inequality was at near all-time highs—Congress was eyeing Medicaid, food stamps and student loans as it sought $35 billion in spending cuts.

The storm only made things worse for the poor, costing an estimated 400,000 jobs and leaving as many as 900,000 people homeless and scattered across the country, often with only a few dollars in their pockets. Without jobs or cash, many are unable to get healthcare; so far, more than half of Katrina evacuees from Louisiana who have applied for Medicaid have been rejected. Given this devastating new reality—and, perhaps more important, the fact that the whole world has been witness to it—many thought Republicans would not dare try to cut aid for the neediest.

They were very wrong. Not only is safety-net spending still on the Senate chopping block, the GOP House leadership has gone even further. At press time it was unclear whether House Republicans would officially change the budget resolution, but Speaker Dennis Hastert was pressing committees to come up with additional "savings" from Medicaid, Head Start, childcare and foster care, bringing the total to at least $50 billion over five years. And while the Senate has responded to pressure from religious groups and backed away from additional cuts to food stamps, the Administration and Congressional Republicans are still looking to squeeze more money out of the program.

"Our nation was hit with the worst natural disaster on record, and everything changed in an instant," is how House Budget Committee chair Jim Nussle explained the belt-tightening. But clearly the post-Katrina Republican strategy—cuts, cuts and cuts, along with the reprise of such Reagan-era concepts as enterprise zones—wasn't formed in an instant. It's a repackaging of the Administration's long-held hostility toward entitlement programs. What else could explain its opposition to bipartisan legislation proposed by Senate Republican Charles Grassley that would grant Medicaid coverage to all Katrina evacuees, temporarily expand unemployment benefits and provide welfare benefits to those who fled the storm to other states? The White House's fear, which Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt put into words, is that it would create "a massive new federal program" and, heaven forbid, "a new Medicaid entitlement."

Of course, House Republicans and the White House haven't found the looming crisis worrisome enough to change their plans to carry out the $70 billion tax cuts passed earlier this year. Already, cuts made in 2001 and 2003, which mostly benefit those making more than $1 million, are netting those families an average of $103,000 a year. Two more tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the very wealthy are scheduled to go into effect next year. And the war budget remains intact, with another $50 billion for Iraq just authorized by Congress.

After the cuts to Medicaid and food stamps are finalized at the end of October, Republicans are likely to turn their attention to

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Forbes FYI

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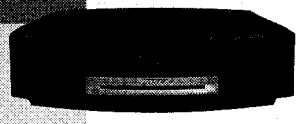

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COMMENT

the welfare bill. Childcare funding has been a major sticking point in the three years the legislation has been stalled in Congress. In the past, even conservative workfare advocates have backed increases in such funding, noting that parents can't climb out of poverty unless they have a safe place for their children. But this time, whether through the slash-and-burn process known as budget reconciliation or through a new law, the GOP leadership is poised to ratchet up work requirements for women on welfare with no increase whatsoever in childcare funds.

The good news is that there is mounting, vocal opposition to gouging these programs while preserving tax cuts for the rich. Every Democrat present voted against the Congressional budget resolution in April that called for $35 billion in cuts. And since the storm even some moderate Republicans have signaled their unwillingness to go along. Senate Democrats have asked majority leader Bill Frist to put off cuts in spending. And a coalition of activist groups are circulating a petition against tax breaks and budget cuts. Time is tight before Congress finalizes the budget, but as the Administration and House Republicans seize on the storm as an excuse to rip more holes in the safety net, they're showing us it's never too late to change budget priorities. After all, as Jim Nussle says, everything can change in an instant. SHARON LERNER

Sharon Lerner is a senior fellow at the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School University.

Asbestos Liability Scam

What do Ford, General Motors, General Electric, Dow Chemical, Pfizer and Viacom have in common, besides being on the Fortune 500 list? A nasty little problem called asbestos. All these companies have used—and continue to use—this toxin, exposing employees and consumers to asbestos long after it was known to be harmful. All of them are beset by thousands of claims filed by asbestos victims, and all have been ordered to pay

In Fact . . .

POLITICS AND THE PRIZE

■ Asked by *Washington Post* reporter Lally Weymouth if he thought his finding that Iraq had no nuclear weapons program was the reason the Bush Administration hounded him as director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei said diplomatically, "I don't know. Someone told me it is dangerous to be wrong but even more dangerous to be right." You wouldn't think that talking back to the Bush Administration would be a credential for a Nobel Prize winner, but blame it on US unilateralism. ElBaradei's independent stance was prominently noted in the news stories about his winning this year's peace laurel. Contrary to grumbling right-wing critics, however, we very much doubt that the Nobel judges based their selections on the winners' anti-Americanism. It's rather more complicated. ElBaradei didn't start out to defy Washington. It just happened that in the course of leading the IAEA in its mission to halt nuclear proliferation, he ran head-on into an Administration careening toward war on Iraq. Ignoring a vicious US campaign to discredit him, ElBaradei and the IAEA stuck to the task of carrying out inspections of Iraq's nuclear facilities, emerging with a conclusion that the United States spent some $600 million after the war confirming that Iraq had no nuclear weapons program. One can think of no more deserving winner of a prize for peace than a man who exemplified a clear, sensible, sane alternative to war. • British Playwright Harold Pinter, winner of this year's Nobel Prize for Literature, has opposed US overreach since at least 1948, when he became a conscientious objector rather than serve in the British Army. "That was a political act," he told interviewer Nicholas Hern. "I was terribly disturbed as a young man by the cold war. And McCarthyism." A staunch peacenik and fighter for human rights, Pinter has over the years issued passionate denunciations of US policies, from the war in El Salvador to the invasion of Iraq. ("We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery and degradation to the Iraqi people and call it 'bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East,'" he wrote.) Pinter's activism exemplifies a virtue that has become increasingly apparent in the careers of great writers of our time—the willingness to speak truth to power. As he told Hern, his plays had frequently dealt with abuse of authority and the struggle for power in personal relationships, but the short play *One for the Road* (1984) marked a turning point. It is a searing indictment of torture. Stripped of political specifics, the torturer character is a Pinter social sadist *in extremis*, obscenely flaunting his absolute power over his victims. Pinter's enigmatic plays cannot be fully understood without pondering their political dimension.

MINOR LIFERS

■ Until the Supreme Court ruled the practice cruel and unusual punishment, America was the only country that executed murderers who committed their offenses when they were under 18. We tend to forget that the United States is also one of a small minority of nations that permit life-without-parole sentences for child offenders. According to a joint report by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2,225 youths who committed a crime while they were minors are currently spending the rest of their lives in US prisons without hope of parole. Of this number—by far the highest in the world—93 percent were convicted of murder, 26 percent of those for felony murder, i.e., as accessories to crimes involving murder. More statistics: 59 percent of those sentenced were first offenders, forty-two states allow such sentences, blacks are ten times more likely than whites to receive them. Thirteen other nations permit LWOP for convicted minors, 132 specifically ban it. There are only about twelve LWOP child offenders in the rest of the world.

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COMMENT

damages amounting to millions—in some cases billions—of dollars. And all are in desperate need of a legislative cure for their asbestos woes, one that would shrink their liability. So they bought one. It's called FAIR—the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act.

FAIR is sponsored by Senators Arlen Specter and Patrick Leahy, who have alerted the Senate to prepare for a vote on the bill sometime this fall. The watchdog group Public Citizen estimates that the asbestos industry—which includes both asbestos manufacturers and "Tier 2" companies, like Ford and GE, that use asbestos in their products—has spent roughly $145 million over the past two years peddling the bill to Congress. But that's a pittance compared with the savings the bill would yield them. If FAIR becomes law, Public Citizen estimates, the top ten asbestos corporations' liability will be slashed by 79 percent, or $20 billion. This is textbook corporate welfare under the guise of "tort reform," the movement to absolve corporations of their legal responsibilities to those whom they injure, contaminate or kill.

Like other tort reform efforts, FAIR is being promoted as a response to "frivolous lawsuits," but it is less a reactive measure than a pre-emptive one. Asbestos disease is on the rise: According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and the National Center for Health Statistics, it will peak around 2015, claiming roughly 100,000 lives between now and then. With asbestos still widely used in both residential and commercial construction—as well as in household products ranging from fertilizers to insulation—dangerous exposures persist. The American Thoracic Society estimates that in the construction industry alone, 1.3 million workers are exposed to it daily, many of them among the most vulnerable members of the workforce. According to Jonathan Bennett of the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, "A tremendous amount of asbestos removal is done illegally...and it is most commonly done by corrupt contractors who hire immigrant workers who are desperate for jobs."

FAIR places such high-risk workers in further jeopardy. If the bill passes, workers who develop asbestos disease will have to produce extensive records linking their exposure to their workplace in order to receive compensation. Trying to extract records from unscrupulous employers is hard enough under the current tort system, but FAIR—which not only places arbitrary caps on the amount of compensation victims can receive but also restricts lawyers' fees to 5 percent of the award—will make it all too likely that workers will go through the process unassisted. Day laborers trying to prove they've been exposed to asbestos by a negligent contractor will face a Sisyphean task.

And asbestos is hardly limited to construction sites. A 2004 Environmental Working Group report noted that those at serious risk "include the families of the men and women who work with asbestos, the communities that surround current and former asbestos mines...and consumers who innocently exposed themselves and family members to asbestos through products like hair dryers, electric blankets, attic insulation, home siding and ceiling and floor tiles." This widespread exposure lays the groundwork for a public health crisis that would carry a massive price tag for asbestos companies.

But if FAIR passes, asbestos victims will no longer be able to take them to court. Instead, people who develop asbestos-related disease would seek compensation from an industry-sponsored trust fund, administered by a presidential appointee and advised by industry representatives. FAIR's backers—who range from the National Association of Manufacturers to the United Auto Workers—argue that by eliminating frivolous lawsuits, this system will save jobs in embattled US industries while providing just compensation for the "truly sick." But the truth is that under FAIR many asbestos victims will never see a dime of compensation.

Under FAIR's trust-fund system, it would no longer be sufficient for victims to prove that asbestos made them sick. To establish a claim, they would have to meet FAIR's "medical" criteria for asbestos-related disease, which have no basis in scientific fact. Says Bennett, "The problem for the asbestos companies is that so many people have asbestos disease that they've had to redefine what that is." FAIR stipulates, for example, that lung cancer patients seeking compensation must have asbestos scarring in both lungs. The bill also demands that claimants demonstrate a minimum exposure period of fifteen months—even though it is well established that just one month of occupational exposure to asbestos can double the risk of lung cancer.

Treating asbestos-related diseases like mesothelioma and asbestosis—after the oxygen tanks have been purchased and the chemotherapy and pain medications paid for—can cost an individual patient millions. But the toll asbestos takes on its victims cannot be measured in dollars and cents alone. As James Fite, national secretary of the White Lung Association (a group devoted to educating the public about the hazards of asbestos exposure), explains, "You're talking about people who all their lives were strong and built things and were good with tools. Now they have to worry about how far they park their car from the grocery store. Will they be able to carry those groceries across the parking lot?"

FAIR paves the way for a grim scenario: Deprived of the right to take their cases to court and forced to appeal to an industry-controlled fund for compensation, tens of thousands of asbestos victims will be left to suffocate while asbestos companies are absolved of their crimes. Bennett notes that FAIR's sponsors like to call it a "no-fault bill," because the legislation does not identify a single company responsible for asbestos-related damages. But it is public knowledge that the fault for America's asbestos disease epidemic lies with Halliburton, Honeywell and the scores of other corporate powerhouses that have poisoned their workforces and their communities. Meanwhile, healthcare costs continue to rise, employers continue to cut medical benefits for active and retired workers, and asbestos use shows no signs of abating. Perhaps most frightening, with right-wing attacks on public services—from OSHA to Social Security—and employer attacks on unionization, health benefits and pensions accelerating, these ineligible asbestos victims will likely be only the first wave in a flood of castoff ill, left literally gasping for breath.

WILLIAM JOHNSON AND KATE LEVIN

William Johnson is co-editor of Labor Notes. *Kate Levin is an assistant editor at Metropolitan Books.*

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COMIX NATION

The Blame Game™

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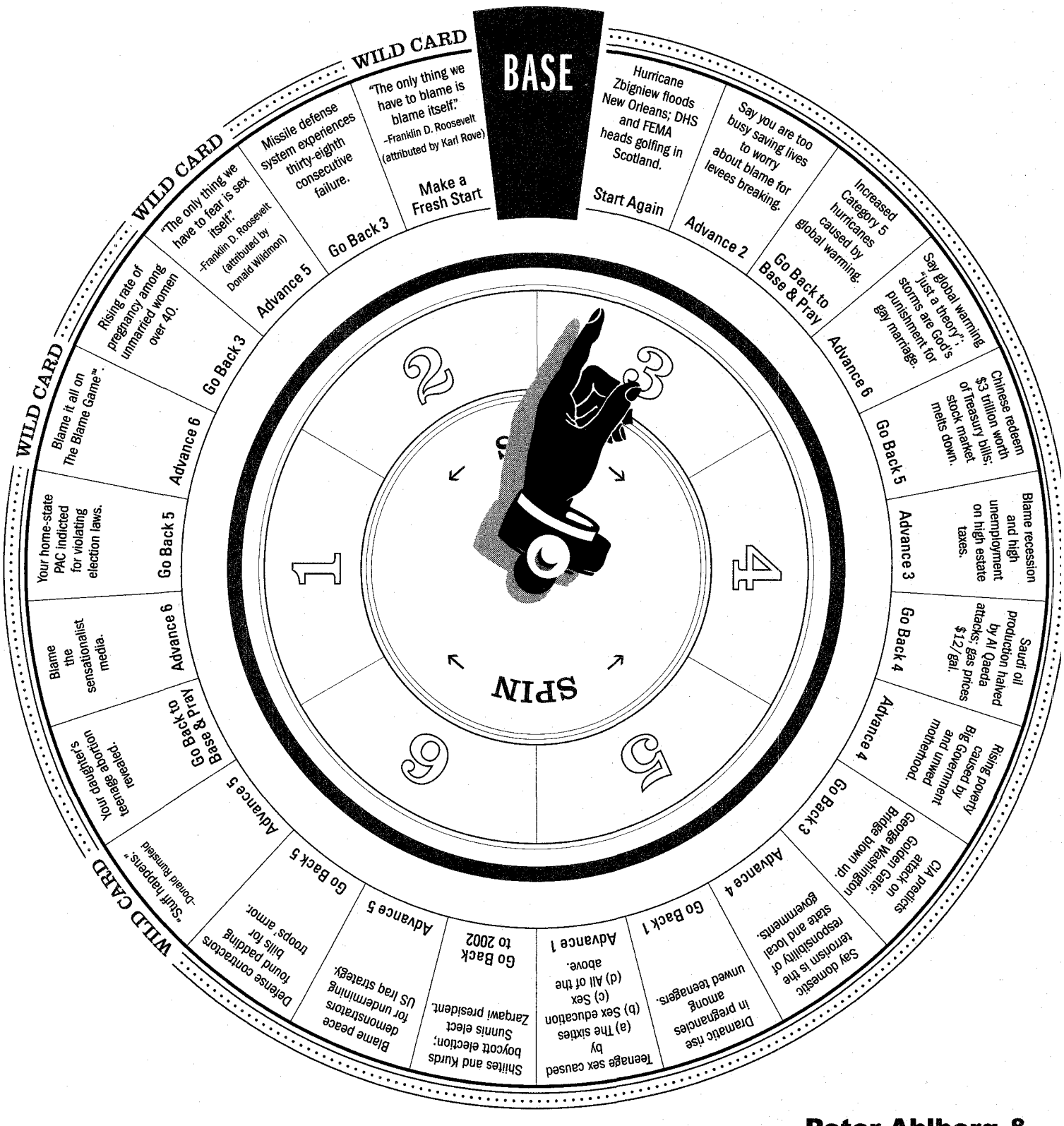
BASE
Hurricane Zbigniew floods New Orleans; DHS and FEMA heads golfing in Scotland.
Start Again
Say you are too busy saving lives to worry about blame for levees breaking.
Advance 2
Increased Category 5 hurricanes caused by global warming.
Go Back to Base & Pray
Say global warming "just a theory"; storms are God's punishment for gay marriage.
Advance 6
Chinese redeem $3 trillion worth of Treasury bills; stock market melts down.
Go Back 5
Blame recession and high unemployment on high estate taxes.
Advance 3
Saudi oil production halved by Al Qaeda attacks; gas prices $12/gal.
Go Back 4
Rising poverty caused by Big Government and unwed motherhood.
Advance 4
CIA predicts attack on Golden Gate; George Washington Bridge blown up.
Go Back 3
Say domestic terrorism is the responsibility of state and local governments.
Advance 4
Dramatic rise in pregnancies among unwed teenagers.
Go Back 1
Teenage sex caused by (a) The sixties boycott election; Sunnis elect Zarqawi president. (b) Sex education (c) Sex (d) All of the above.
Advance 1
Shiites and Kurds boycott election; Sunnis elect Zarqawi president.
Go Back to 2002
Blame peace demonstrators for undermining US Iraq strategy.
Advance 5
Defense contractors found padding bills for troops' armor.
Go Back 5
"Stuff happens." -Donald Rumsfeld
Advance 5
Your daughter's teenage abortion revealed.
Go Back to Base & Pray
Blame the sensationalist media.
Advance 6
Your home-state PAC indicted for violating election laws.
Go Back 5
Blame it all on The Blame Game™.
Advance 6
Rising rate of pregnancy among unmarried women over 40.
Go Back 3
"The only thing we have to fear is sex itself." -Franklin D. Roosevelt (attributed by Donald Wildmon)
Advance 5
Missile defense system experiences thirty-eighth consecutive failure.
Go Back 3
"The only thing we have to blame is blame itself." -Franklin D. Roosevelt (attributed by Karl Rove)
Make a Fresh Start
WILD CARD
WILD CARD
WILD CARD
WILD CARD
SPIN
1
2
3
4
5
6

Peter Ahlberg (PeterJAhlberg@gmail.com), who created the art, is a designer based in New York City. Richard Lingeman, who conceived the idea and wrote the text, is a Nation *senior editor.*

Peter Ahlberg & Richard Lingeman

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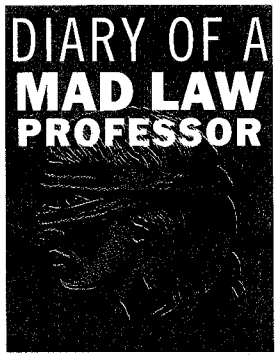
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Nearer, My God, to Thee



I hung a sign on the door. GONE FISHING, it said. I needed to ponder the state of the world. I was feeling a little left out on a planet where the religious forces of Armageddon and the secular warlords of Global Imperium had finally stopped battling each other, signed a truce and gone into business together. The United Nations had been marked by The Sign of the Beast, said beast properly caged, and now naught but snapping and growling emanated from within. The three branches of government had melted down into one big happy family, although it could not be said that we the people were related to any of them. All the judicial activists on the Supreme Court had been replaced by obedient missionaries of The Word, who knew to address the President as Dear Leader, or on formal occasions, Oh Greatest of Great Leaders.

There was no more playing the race card, because the Civil Rights Commission was headed by a man who didn't believe that civil rights was the way to achieve civil rights. The Attorney General was a thoughtful fellow who advocated torture if and only when the electric chair was not enough. The Iraqi people had embraced their newest attempt at a Constitution in voter turnouts of a mere 98 percent in some districts. This number was widely interpreted as evidence of the diversity of viewpoints now flourishing with the emergence of democracy, recalling particularly that during the reign of Saddam Hussein a referendum supporting his regime was distinguished by voter turnout of 100 percent or more.

Even the contentiousness of reproductive rights, which had been such a fine source of profit for the female persuasion, had disappeared once one's opinion of abortion was finally conceded to be a private matter of "personal views" and theoretical speculation. (Of course, after the legislature renamed the actual act of abortion "murder," there wasn't much to argue in the nontheoretical sense either.) This freed up a lot of my time for more constructive debates about how many days it took God to make the ingrates who believe they were spawned by apes. These days I had time to think about why Heaven chose to punish prostitutes and female impersonators by making the levees to fail and the floodwaters to rise and the nursing homes to be washed away and the buses full of sick old people to explode on the road out of town. It was a mystery, all right. Earthquakes in communist countries were certainly much easier to understand. On a more cheerful note, the melting of the polar ice cap was good news for the cruise industry, which could now schedule little fun runs from Scotland to Siberia in half the olden time.

War and peace had been resolved as well. After the Defense Department stopped counting the numbers of enemy soldiers, they soon stopped counting annoying journalists, whistle-blowing bureaucrats and uppity doctors who wandered from their assigned places. From there it was only a small "aha!" moment before they realized they didn't need to count anyone's dead, including our own. The body count was depressing everyone no end, and besides, there is no such thing as death to a true believer. We're all believers now...

It's odd, I thought, as I lowered my hook, line and sinker into the sea. I remembered an age when calling yourself an African-American feminist was viewed as divisive. One was urged to say something like, "I am an American—of African descent, not that it makes a bit of difference." It seemed like eons ago that George Orwell, in his "Notes on Nationalism," complained of the nationalist's obsession with nomenclature and the order in which countries are named: "Certain Americans have expressed dissatisfaction because 'Anglo-American' is the form of combination of those two words. It has been proposed to substitute 'Americo-British.'"

Now all such nonsense had been laid to rest. It didn't matter my race, sex, ethnicity or job experience if only I chose to be reborn as a "good Christian woman." I sighed. Besides, I thought, ever since the Great Tax Cut, China, which had effectively underwritten the ensuing national debt, called in all the notes it held and Americans were quietly adjusting to neocolonial status. Soon I'd be reborn yet again, as Sino-Americo-African. Not that it makes a bit of difference.

A bite! A tug upon my line! A fish? A whale? A hope of such in these so-oil-slicked waters? It is an ancient bottle, a faded, crumpled message stoppered within:

I, poor miserable soul, being shipwrecked during a dreadful storm, came on shore on this unfortunate island, which I call the Island of Despair. I know not how many of my compatriots survived the dismal circumstances, but I commit my hand to record this most fearful of travails. The Ship of State set out from port a gleaming pride, her sails a-billow, her jolly crew singing "Pax Americana." The captain was strong-jawed and his countenance radiated a pleasing, manly appeal as he posed on the prow looking toward the future. He spoke of mission and accomplishment and God. We set off with high hopes of the bounty we would find in the course of our adventure.

The ship was well stocked with meat and drink and we sailed north with scarcely a care for many a month. When the wind picked up it was only a few of us who had any sense of foreboding. The first mate told the captain that he didn't like the sharp whip in the breeze, but the captain was insulted by his impertinence and replaced him with an obedient counselor. When the sky grew gray the second mate renewed the plaint but the captain took offense at his lack of deference and replaced him with a minion who pointed to the silver lining of the clouds. When the waves grew high and we saw icebergs nigh, a few of us went to the captain and expressed the burden of our misgivings. The captain ordered full ahead and threw us in the brig. Later that night we heard the awful sound of the splintering hull. O Captain, my Captain! we called. But the captain, by now in a well-appointed lifeboat that had miraculously appeared, rowed nimbly toward the horizon, whilst reproaching us for failing to pray hard enough. And that is how I and my poor shipmates were Left Behind to drown. ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Corrupt, Incompetent & *Off Center*

Here is the liberals' problem in a nutshell: More than 30 percent of Americans happily answer to the appellation "conservative," while 18 percent call themselves "liberal." And yet when questioned by pollsters, a super-majority of more than 60 percent take positions liberal in everything but name. Indeed, on many if not most issues, Americans hold views well to the left of those espoused by almost any national Democratic politician.

In a May survey published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 65 percent of respondents said they favor providing health insurance to all Americans, even if it means raising taxes, and 86 percent said they favor raising the minimum wage. Seventy-seven percent said they believe the country "should do whatever it takes to protect the environment." A September Gallup Poll finds that 59 percent consider the Iraq War a mistake and 63 percent agree that US forces should be partially or completely withdrawn.

Nevertheless, extremist right-wingers, including a few apparent criminals, enjoy a stranglehold on our political system and media discourse. And so the majority views of the American people are treated with contempt by pundits and politicians alike. To give just a minor example, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks—the writer who best understands the dynamics of the contemporary Democratic Party, according to the smart boys at ABC's The Note—began a recent screed with the proclamation: "After a while, you get sick of the DeLays of the right and the Deans of the left." Note the implied equivalence between the corrupt and extreme Tom DeLay—who regularly compares the Environmental Protection Agency to the Nazis—and Howard Dean, a balanced-budget fiscal conservative and ally of the NRA whose "radical" position on Iraq now puts him to the right of most Americans. Or how about the treatment meted out by smarty-pants pundits to Al Gore, one of the few politicians who have given voice to majority American positions on the war, the environment and the dishonesty and ideological obsessions of the Bush Administration. Brooks termed him "unhinged." Fred Barnes said he was "nutty." Charles Krauthammer, speaking, he said, in his capacity as a psychiatrist, called him on "the edge of looniness."

Because right-wingers have been so adept at controlling the political discourse, they have succeeded in moving the Democrats rightward too. Brooks himself has pointed out that the conservative media have "cohered to form a dazzlingly efficient ideology delivery system that swamps liberal efforts to get their ideas out." In fact, all that's necessary to discredit an individual or an idea in the present poisoned atmosphere is to apply the label "liberal," which conservatives equate with "treason," "slander" and "treachery" (Ann Coulter); "idiocy" (Mona Charen); "Communism" (David Horowitz); inspiration for child murder (Newt Gingrich); Islamic terrorism (Andrew Sullivan, Christopher Hitchens, Horowitz again); and priestly pedophilia (Rick Santorum).

Even allowing for the possibility of mental and emotional unbalance on the part of some of those quoted above, the ground for these attacks has undoubtedly been seeded by liberals' mistakes. Back in 1991 Thomas and Mary Edsall published their revelatory work *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, in which they illustrated the cost of liberal hubris and political miscalculation. The combination of rising tax rates, judicially imposed integration, affirmative action and abortion laws, the redistribution programs of the Great Society and the occasionally violent excesses of leftist social movements—coupled with the brilliant exploitation of these disparate phenomena by a well-funded, well-disciplined conservative movement—laid the groundwork for the takeover of American politics by the right.

Now, fourteen years later, political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have published an equally illuminating investigation into the underlying dynamics of our present political predicament. *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy* demonstrates just how badly Americans are served by media that accept the fundamental frame put forth by far-right Republicans. Did you know, for instance, that according to all available evidence, Americans have not grown more conservative in recent decades? (Judy Woodruff just stated that myth as a "fact" on *The Colbert Report*.) And what about the fact that in the 2004 election "moral issues" like gay marriage actually benefited Kerry, not Bush, by producing turnout? (In "What's the Matter With *What's the Matter With Kansas?*" Princeton professor Larry Bartels draws similar conclusions.)

Hacker and Pierson shine a light on the methods employed by the governing right-wing clique to maintain and expand their power without paying the price for their unpopular policies and base-focused system of rewards. Examining the 2001 tax cuts, the Bush energy plan, the Medicare drug bill and the deregulation of almost every industry that has a lobbying team and campaign-contribution budget, they expose tactics like "tailored disinformation," designed to confuse a poorly informed public; Mafia-like manipulation of the levers of power in the House, Senate and White House that not only defenestrates the Democratic opposition but cuts off their sources of financial support; and a network of "New Power Brokers," like the aforementioned DeLay, Grover Norquist and countless think tanks, media moguls, funders and lobbyists who work together to game the system at a level that is either too complicated or too boring to attract intelligent scrutiny. (If our leading political reporters were forced to address these authors' evidence or to stop mouthing the nonsense dominating their own stories, our politics would be transformed overnight.)

With leading Republicans looking at potential slammer time and Bush's approval rating in a tailspin, providence has given liberals an opportunity pregnant with possibility. Americans already share our values and no longer remain in thrall to the linguistic terror tactics of right-wing propagandists. What we need now is a liberal language to help people connect needs and desires to liberals' vision. I'll take up that challenge in my next column. ■

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ARTICLES

HURRICANE GUMBO

MIKE DAVIS AND ANTHONY FONTENOT

Evangeline Parish, Louisiana

Nothing is moving in Evangeline Parish except for the sky. Black rain bands, the precursors of Hurricane Rita's fury, scud by at disconcerting velocity. Wind gusts uproot ancient oaks and topple a decrepit billboard advertising an extinct brand of chewing tobacco. The rice fields are flooding and the roads are barricaded with tree debris.

Millions of desperate Texans and southern Louisianans are still gridlocked on interstate highways headed north from Rita's path, but here in Ville Platte, a town of 11,000 in the heart of Acadiana (French-speaking southern Louisiana), the traditional response to an impending hurricane is not to evacuate but to gather together and cook.

Dolores Fontenot, matriarch of a clan that ordinarily mobilizes forty members for Sunday dinner (the "immediate family") and 800 for a wedding (the "extended family"), is supervising the preparation of a colossal crab gumbo. Its rich aroma is sensory reassurance against the increasingly sinister machine-gunning of the rain on her home's boarded-up windows.

Although every major utility from Baton Rouge to Galveston has crashed, a noisy generator in the carport keeps lights flickering inside as little kids chase one another and older men converse worriedly about the fate of their boats and hunting camps. There are disturbing reports about the waters rising around Pecan Island, Holly Beach and Abbeville.

In addition to Fontenot kin, the table is also set for three eminent immunologists from Latin America, whose laboratories at the Tulane and LSU medical centers in New Orleans were flooded by Katrina, destroying several years of invaluable cancer research. The doctors, two from Medellín, Colombia, and one from Mexico City, joke that Ville Platte has become the "Cajun Ark."

It is a surprisingly apt analogy. The folks of Ville Platte, a poor Cajun and black Creole community with a median income less than half that of the rest of the nation, have opened their doors over the past three weeks to more than 5,000 of the displaced people they call "company" (the words "refugee" and "evacuee" are considered too impersonal, even impolite). Local fishermen and hunters, moreover, were among the first volunteers to take boats into New Orleans to rescue desperate residents from their flooded homes.

Ville Platte's homemade rescue and relief effort—organized around the popular slogan "If not us, then who?"—stands in striking contrast to the incompetence of higher levels of government as well as to the hostility of other, wealthier towns, including some white suburbs of New Orleans, toward influxes of evacuees, especially poor people of color. Indeed, Evangeline Parish as a whole has become a surprising island of interracial solidarity and self-organization in a state better known for incorrigible racism and corruption.

What makes Ville Platte and some of its neighboring communities so exceptional?

Part of the answer, we discovered, has been the subtle growth of a regional "nationalism" that has drawn southern Louisiana's root cultures—African-American, black Creole, Cajun and French Indian—closer together in response to the grim and ever-growing threats of environmental and cultural extinction. There is a shared, painful recognition that the land is rapidly sinking and dying, as much from the onslaught of corporate globalization as from climate wrath.

If one wanted to be fashionably academic, Ville Platte's big-heartedness might be construed as a conscious response to the "postcolonial" crisis of Acadiana. In plainer language, it is an act of love in a time of danger: a radical but traditionalist gesture that defies most of the simplistic antinomies—liberal versus conservative, red state versus blue state, freedom of choice versus family values, and so on—that the media use to categorize contemporary American life.

But before arguing theory, it is first necessary to introduce some of the ordinary heroes sitting around Dolores Fontenot's generous dinner table as Rita shakes the earth outside.

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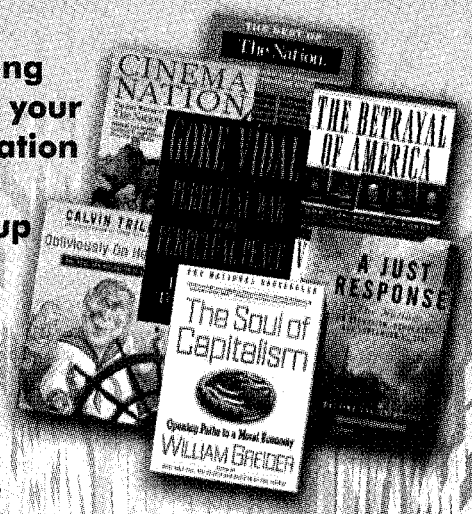

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The Cajun Navy

Edna Fontenot passes around bottles of beer—Corona in honor of the Latin American guests. He is a lean, gentle-spirited man in his late 40s with an impressive résumé of mechanical skills and survival expertise.

"You know, we were all watching New Orleans on television and we realized that somebody's got to help all these people, because nothing was happening. Nothing. Then there was a call [by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries] for small boats. So I said, I'm going. I knew I could do something. I lived in New Orleans and know how to get around on water."

Edna drove to nearby Lafayette (Acadiana's informal capital city) then convoyed with scores of other boat owners to Old Metairie, across from the broken 17th Street Canal that had emptied the waters of Lake Pontchartrain into central New Orleans.

"There was no FEMA, just a big ol' bunch of Cajun guys in their boats. We tried to coordinate best we could, but it was still chaos. It was steaming hot and there was a smell of death. The people on the rooftops and overpasses were desperate. They had been there for several days in the sun with no food, no water. They were dehydrated, blistered and sick...giving up, you know, ready to die."

Edna stayed for two days until floating debris broke his propeller. Although FEMA has recently taken credit for the majority of rescues, Edna scoffs at its claims. Apart from the Coast Guard, he saw only the Wildlife and Fisheries' "Cajun Navy" in action. "That was it. Just us volunteers." He feels guilty that he couldn't afford to fix his boat and return. "I had some good times in that damn city," he says softly, "and, you know, I have more black friends there than white."

City of the Dead

While Edna was saving the living, his brother-in-law, a police detective from another city, was engaged in the grueling, macabre work of retrieving bodies. "Vincent" (his real name can't be used) went out each night in a Fisheries boat with a scuba diver and an M-16-toting National Guard escort.

"I wore a [hazmat] space suit and piloted the boat. I was chosen because I'm trained in forensics, and since I am a Cajun the higher powers assumed I was a water baby. We worked at night because of the heat and to avoid the goddamn news helicopters that hover like vultures during the daytime. We didn't want some poor son of a bitch seeing his grandma covered with ants or crabs on the 6 o'clock news."

Ants and crabs? "Hey, this is Louisiana. The minute New Orleans flooded it became swamp again. The ecosystem returns. Ants float and they build big colonies on floating bodies the same as they would upon a cypress log. And the crabs eat carrion. We'd pulled the crabs off, but the goddamn ants were a real problem."

Mike Davis, who contributes regularly to The Nation, *is the author of the forthcoming* Planet of the Slums *(Verso). Anthony Fontenot, a New Orleans native, is pursuing a PhD in architecture at Princeton. He has written on contemporary conditions in Berlin, Beirut, Kabul and New Orleans.*

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Vincent described the exhausting, gruesome work of hauling bloated bodies aboard the boat and then zipping them into body bags. (FEMA neglected water, food rations and medicine, but did fly thousands of body bags into Louis Armstrong Airport.) Although Vincent was supposed to tag the bags, few victims had any identification. Some didn't have faces.

One of us asks about the demographics of death. "We pulled seventy-seven bodies out of the water. Half were little kids. It was tough—no one died with their eyes closed, and all had fought like hell, some slowly drowning in their attics.

"I deal with crime scenes and human remains all the time and usually keep a professional distance. You have to, if you want to continue to do your job. But sometimes a case really gets to you. We found the corpse of a woman clutching a young baby. Mother or sister, I don't know. I couldn't pry the infant out of the woman's grasp without breaking her fingers. After finally separating them, the baby left a perfect outline imprinted across the lady's chest. That will really haunt me. And so will the goddamn cries of the people we left behind.

"We were under strict orders to remove only bodies. But there were still lots of people on the roofs or leaning out the windows of their houses. They were crazy with fear and thirst. They screamed, begged and cursed us. But we had a boatload of bodies, some probably infectious. So we saved the dead and left the living." Vincent believes that the "sniper activity" so luridly reported in the media was from stranded people who were outraged when boats and helicopters ignored them.

Madonna and Child

Danny Guidry, a paramedic married to a Fontenot cousin, has a story with a happier ending. Along with his partner and driver, he was sent with dozens of ambulances and rescue units from the Cajun parishes to the edge of New Orleans.

As victims were brought in by volunteers in boats or by the Coast Guard in their big Black Hawk helicopters, Danny classified them according to the severity of their condition and took the most critical cases to Baton Rouge, one and a half hours away through the pandemonium of emergency traffic.

Since southern Louisiana's only full-fledged trauma center was in a rapidly flooding hospital in New Orleans, most of the injured or sick evacuees were dropped at a triage center in a Baton Rouge sports stadium where a single nurse, just 24 years old, was in charge of sorting out cases and sending the most serious to already overwhelmed local hospitals.

"By my third trip," Danny explained, "I was working on automatic pilot. You just shut yourself off from the pain and turmoil around you and concentrate on doing your job as carefully and quickly as possible."

But, like Vincent, he found one case extraordinary. "She was a young lady, thirty-three weeks pregnant, in premature labor. She had been in a hospital ready for a caesarean section when the evacuation of the city was announced. Her physician stopped the labor and sent her home, presuming, I guess, that she had access to a car, which she didn't. Her husband went out to look for food, then the levee broke. When we picked her up, the husband had been missing for several days. To make matters

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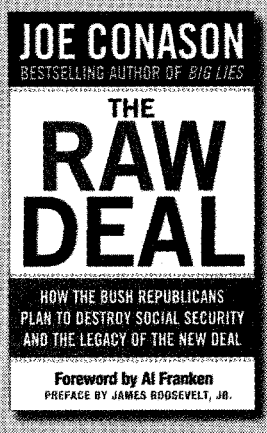
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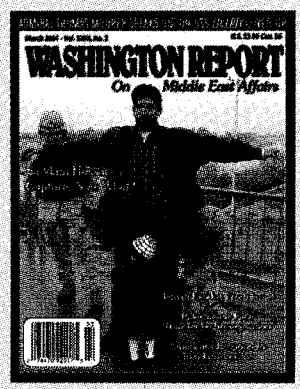

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more complicated, she was cradling a 9-month-old baby that she had rescued from a crack-addict neighbor. Both she and the infant were heat stressed, and my sixth sense told me she might not make it to Baton Rouge.

"It was the longest run of my career. Her IV was bad and I was running out of fluid. She was getting paler, and her blood pressure was falling dangerously. My orders were to take her to the central triage center, but I told my partner to punch it and head straight to the nearest hospital.

"Out of professional protocol I never divulge personal information to a victim. But this case really moved me, so I gave this young woman my phone number and urged her, Please call when you are out of labor. In fact, I kept phoning the hospital to monitor her progress. She had a healthy baby and eventually found her husband. Meanwhile, the infant she had saved was reunited with its mother. Having come this far with this girl, I just couldn't walk away, so my wife and I invited her and her husband to Ville Platte. We found them a little house and she's getting ready to go to college in Lafayette. I helped board up their windows this afternoon."

'Just Friends'

In between Rita's windy tantrums, we made a quick run down to the Civic Center Shelter, where volunteers welcomed new "company" from the hurricane-threatened Louisiana-Texas border area.

The shelter is supported only by local resources but provides ample beds, toys, television, Internet access, superb Cajun-Creole cooking and hospitality to evacuees staying only for a few nights or waiting to be rehoused on a medium-term basis with local residents.

The center's founders include Edna's "Kosher Cajun" cousin Mark Krasnoff (his dad was from Brooklyn) and Jennifer Vidrine, who has become its full-time coordinator. Everyone had told us that Jennifer has the most gorgeous smile in Louisiana. Although she hadn't slept in two days, her smile indeed brightened the entire shelter.

An LSU graduate with a recent fellowship at Harvard's prestigious Kennedy School, Jennifer has had every opportunity to conquer the world, but she wouldn't think of leaving Ville Platte. She talks about the first week after Katrina.

"There were just thousands of tired, scared people on the roads of Evangeline Parish. Not just in cars: Some were walking, carrying everything they still owned in a backpack. Some were crying; they had a look of hopelessness. It was like *The Grapes of Wrath*. Most knew nothing about Ville Platte, but were amazed when we invited them into our homes."

It sounds too good to be true: Acadiana, despite deep cross-racial kinships of culture, religion and blood, was once a bastion of Jim Crow. Just a few years ago an effort by Ville Platte authorities to redistrict the town to dilute the black vote was struck down as a violation of the Voting Rights Act. So we ask Jennifer, who's both "French" and African-American, if the relief effort isn't discreetly color-coded, with a preference for suburban white refugees.

She's unflappable. "No, not at all. We embrace everyone with the same love. And the whole community supports this project: black, white, Catholic, Baptist. Perhaps one-third of all private homes have taken in out-of-town folks. And it doesn't matter where our 'company' comes from: the Ninth Ward [black] or Chalmette [white]. That's just the way we are. We're all raised to take care of neighbors and give kindness to strangers. This is what makes this little town special and why I love it so much."

Jennifer praises local schoolteachers and the City Council. But when we ask about the contribution of the national relief organizations and the federal government, she points to the banner over the shelter's entrance: NO RED CROSS, NO SALVATION ARMY OR FEDERAL FUNDS... JUST FRIENDS.

"I started trying to contact the Red Cross immediately. I phoned them for thirteen days straight. I was told 'no personnel are available.' [According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Red Cross, which raised $1 billion in the name of aiding Katrina victims, had 163,000 volunteers available.] Finally, they promised to come, but then canceled at the last minute. FEMA is just the same. We have yet to see the federal government in person." Indeed, before Rita closed the roads, we saw no evidence of a federal presence, although we ran across several SUVs with Halliburton logos.

Ville Platte, whose black majority has an annual per capita income of only $5,300, has thus managed to help thousands of strangers without a single cent of Red Cross or federal aid. We remain incredulous: What superior organizational principle or charismatic leadership is responsible for such an achievement?

Jennifer is bemused. "Listen, my committee is my telephone. I call folks and they respond. Food, clothing, cots, medicine—it's all provided. Even poor people down here have some extra deer meat in the freezer or an old quilt or an extra bed. And all of us know how to spontaneously cooperate. My God, we're always organizing christenings or family gatherings. So why do we need a lot of formal leadership?" In a nation currently without competent leadership, this may be a reasonable, even deeply profound, question.

The People's Republic of the Bayous?

So what does it all mean?

Mark Krasnoff thinks Ville Platte is the shape of things to come: southern Louisiana getting its interracial act together to take on its colonizers and rulers. A small, wiry man with the build of a dancer or gymnast, he is an actor (most recently in a prophetic FX network TV drama, *Oil Storm*, about a category 6 hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast) and a stunning bilingual raconteur. He is also the Che Guevara-cum-Huey Long of Evangeline Parish. His beat-up pickup wears the bumper sticker LOUISIANA: THIRD WORLD AND PROUD OF IT.

"Look, Louisiana is the same as any exploited oil-rich country—like a Nigeria or Venezuela. For generations the big oil and gas companies have pumped billions out of our bayous and offshore waters, and all we get back is coastal erosion, pollution, cancer and poverty. And now bloated bodies and dead towns.

"People in the rest of America need to understand there are no 'natural' disasters in Louisiana. This is one of the richest lands in the world—everything from sugar and crawfish to oil and sulfur—but we're neck-to-neck with Mississippi as the poorest state. Sure, Washington builds impressive levees to

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safeguard river commerce and the shipping industry, but do you honestly think they give a shit about blacks, Indians and coonasses [pejorative for Cajuns]? Poor people's levees, if they even existed, were about as good as our schools [among the worst in the nation]. Katrina just followed the outlines of inequality."

Mark is incandescent. "The very soul of Louisiana is now at stake." He enumerates the working-class cultures threatened with extinction: the "second line" black neighborhoods of New Orleans, the French Indians in Houma, the Isleno (Canary Islander) and Vietnamese fishermen in Plaquemines, Cajun communities all along the Gulf Coast.

"If our 'leaders' have their way this whole goddamn region will become either a toxic graveyard or a big museum where jazz, zydeco and Cajun music will still be played for tourists but the cultures that gave them life are defunct or dispersed."

Mark's worst fears, of course, are rapidly becoming facts on the ground. Bush's Housing Secretary, Alphonso Jackson, told the *Houston Chronicle* on September 30, "I think it would be a mistake to rebuild the Ninth Ward." He predicted that New Orleans' black population, 67 percent before Katrina, would shrink to 35 to 40 percent. "New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again," he said.

This was undoubtedly music to the ears of Republican master strategist Karl Rove, who knows that the loss of 10,000 or 15,000 active black Democratic voters could alter the balance of power in Louisiana and transform overnight a pink state into a red state. The GOP could gain another senator as well as the governorship.

Mark's preferred solution is secession: "Let us keep our oil and gas revenues and we can preserve our way of life as well. We don't really belong to the same cultural system anyway. You prize money, competition and individual success; we value family, community and celebration. Give us independence and we'll restore the wetlands, rebuild the Ninth Ward and move the capital to Evangeline Parish. If you wish, you can ship the Statue of Liberty to Ville Platte and we'll add a new inscription: Send us your tired and huddled masses and we'll feed them hurricane gumbo."

We all laugh, but everyone understands it is gallows humor. Ordinary people across Louisiana and the Gulf Coast are beginning to understand what it's like to be Palestinians or Iraqis at the receiving end of Washington's hypocritical promises and disastrous governmental and military actions.

Katrina and Rita have stripped Louisiana naked: Exposed to a brutal light are government neglect, corporate rapine and blatant ethnic cleansing. Equally revealed, however, is the bayou country's ancient moral bedrock of populist revolt, cultural resistance and New Testament generosity. But when in the entire bloody course of history has the kindness of strangers ever defeated the conspiracy of money and power? ■

Donations (make checks payable to Evangeline Parish Katrina Relief Fund) and messages of solidarity (as well as requests for the recipe for hurricane gumbo) may be sent to: Ville Platte Shelter, c/o Jennifer Vidrine, PO Box 795, Ville Platte, LA 70586; (jennifervidrine@hotmail.com).

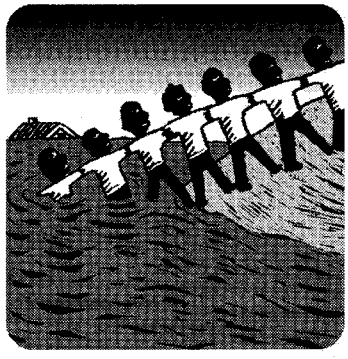
HURRICANE VICTIMS ORGANIZE TO GAIN A VOICE IN REBUILDING THEIR COMMUNITIES.

Beyond Shelters

MICHAEL TISSERAND

Baker, Louisiana

A chain-link fence circles the unnamed evacuee community that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has founded on the outskirts of Baker, Louisiana. Inside, hundreds of trailers have been assigned their own section letters and numbers, which are hand-scrawled on each trailer's front window. As dusk settles over Baker, residents wander down identical gravel paths, searching for new addresses.



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Tanya Harris steers her dusty Camry through the gate. She slows down; nobody stops her. Harris parks near a large, unlit building that she decides must be a community hall. It's one of the few structures here that's not on wheels. Gladys Bernard, who's riding in the passenger seat, peers at the hall. "The sign says welcome," she says hopefully.

Harris, who works with Bernard at ACORN, a national community group for low- and moderate-income families, grabs an instant camera and stacks of fliers. One stack is for residents who want ACORN to field complaints about jobs, housing and other post-evacuation concerns. Other fliers announce an upcoming protest for residents of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, the devastated working-class neighborhood that for weeks has remained almost entirely off-limits to residents and business owners. Harris's family has resided in the Lower Ninth Ward ever since the late 1940s, when her grandfather, a longshoreman, bought four plots of land for $200 apiece.

As Harris leads the way into the dark hall, where a few families are finishing dinner, she uncannily locates Lower Ninth neighbors. She trades addresses with one woman; they share names of people they both know. "I just want to go home, baby," the woman says. Harris gives her a flier for the upcom-

Michael Tisserand is the former editor of Gambit Weekly, *the alternative newsweekly of New Orleans. He is writing a book about education and Katrina evacuees.*

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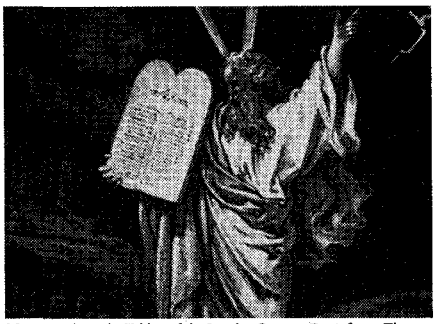

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About Your Professor

Professor Amy-Jill Levine (Ph.D., Duke University) is E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, where she also holds the position of Director of the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality. She is a prodigious scholar, author, and lecturer.

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ing ACORN-sponsored sit-in, set to take place on a bridge that crosses the Industrial Canal into the Lower Ninth. The group is demanding that residents at least be allowed to view their property and salvage what belongings they can. "We're going to make them let us go in," she says.

ACORN, which has temporarily moved its national offices from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, is part of a growing number of activist groups that are working to organize Hurricane Katrina evacuees and help them find roles in the rebuilding of their communities. Shortly after the hurricane struck, Harris was bunking down in the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center shelter in Gonzales, Louisiana, when she received a text message from ACORN. The group helped her find an apartment for an extended family that includes both preschoolers and Harris's 83-year-old grandmother.

Now Harris visits shelters, trailer parks and other sites to organize evacuees. She also traveled to Washington to meet with Congressional leaders and participate in a press conference with House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi. "This is like therapy for me," Harris says, hurrying across a gravel lot to speak with another trailer-park resident.

'I call people to tell them about a meeting,' says ACORN organizer Tanya Harris, 'and they say, I'm in Idaho.'

In addition to the Lower Nine (as its called here) action, ACORN's activities include Wednesday meetings in Baton Rouge that usually attract about seventy-five evacuees. In mid-October the organization launched a new Hurricane Survivors Association. ACORN's most ambitious effort is scheduled for November 7 and 8, when the group will host a conference on the reconstruction of New Orleans, bringing fifty experts in fields such as urban planning and the environment together with fifty evacuated residents for a series of discussions. These discussions will be teleconferenced across the United States to cities with large concentrations of evacuees. The goal is to arm evacuees with information and to help them find entry points into a reconstruction debate that currently seems as confused as the post-Katrina rescue operation.

"Everyone is talking right now without any plan," says ACORN founder Wade Rathke, who's displaced from his own residence in New Orleans. "I certainly don't have the answers to some issues. I don't know the future of the Ninth Ward. But what I'm certain of is that the voices of people who live in New Orleans are currently being left out of the discussion, and they've got to be at the center of it."

That's also the aim of the Survivors Leadership Group, a Houston-based assembly of evacuated community leaders organized in the wake of Hurricane Katrina by The Metropolitan Organization (TMO), a group affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation network. Renee Barrios, the Foundation's lead organizer in Houston, recalls a Labor Day meeting when the distinction between treating Katrina evacuees as victims and as potential leaders became especially pronounced. On that day, she says, Oprah Winfrey and other celebrities were appearing in the Astrodome, each of them promising aid in voices that boomed over the arena's PA system. Organizers with TMO almost turned around and left, but then decided they should first announce that they were looking for evacuees who wanted to organize.

A core group of about 100 evacuees met that day. Their first successful action was moving a line of evacuees who were waiting for Red Cross assistance at Houston's Reliant Center out of the stifling heat and into the air-conditioned building. The group also launched a successful petition drive that prompted Houston Mayor Bill White to ask the Federal Communications Commission to restrain cell phone providers from cutting off 504-area phones for nonpayment of bills.

The group also gained a spot in White's "Katrina Working Group," along with police officials, school administrators, city councilors and other local decision-makers. "When the mayor asked us to come to the table," says Barrios, "we said that we'll participate, but we're going to organize. Survivors are going to know best what's going to work and not work."

Christine Stephens, an Industrial Areas Foundation supervising organizer, says the group is working on two fronts: to help evacuees work toward better living conditions in their new communities, and to help those returning to New Orleans have a say in the rebuilding. In Louisiana that means gaining access to the various commissions headed by Governor Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, as well as getting folks' voices heard in upcoming special legislative sessions.

TMO and ACORN are working on separate tracks toward common goals; neither Rathke nor Barrios seems particularly interested in combining forces. Some coalitions are forming, however. ACORN has teamed with the NAACP, along with the AFL-CIO and other labor groups, to form New Opportunity and Hope, calling attention to worker-related issues during the reconstruction. In New Orleans veteran activists and political consultants have formed two umbrella groups for activists: the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, and the Rebuilding Louisiana Coalition.

Organizing displaced residents to agitate on their own behalf poses unusual challenges. "I call people to tell them about a meeting," says Tanya Harris, "and they say, I'm in Idaho." For Harris, the first step remains getting her old neighbors back to the Lower Nine. As she sees it, that will keep them on the path toward home. Walking through the Baker trailer park, she doesn't hide her disappointment every time she encounters residents who say they're not going back. About half the people she meets tonight tell her this.

"Are you going to return?" she asks a couple from Harvey. "To what?" the man answers blankly. "My apartment? It's gone."

Harris tells them ACORN can help them find housing wherever they land. She takes down their names and phone numbers. On her way back to the car, she says that she knows everyone has tough choices to make, but it's difficult talking to people who are moving on. "Decisions are being made all around us," she says. "I want us to go back to fight." ■

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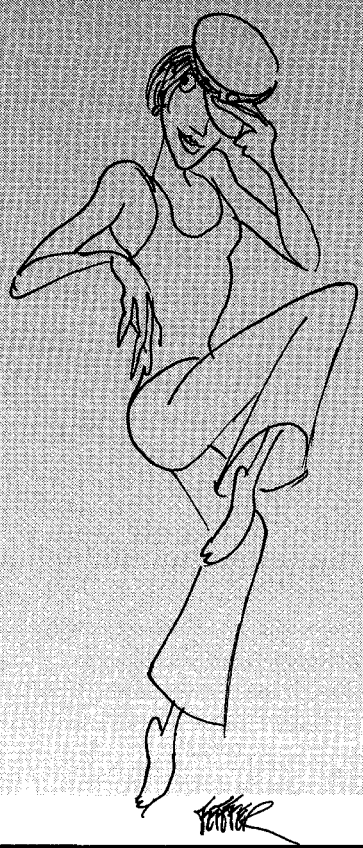

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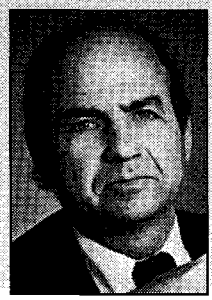

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Nov. 15	Tue	Mazatlán, Mexico	8:00 AM	6:00 PM
Nov. 16	Wed	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico	8:00 AM	10:00 PM
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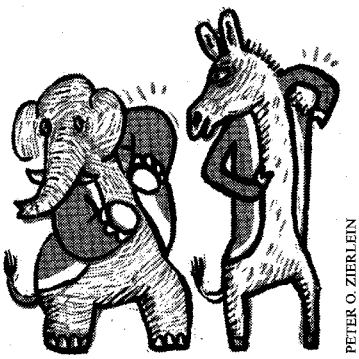
LET'S NOT MISUNDERSTAND THE TACTICS THAT PROPELLED CONSERVATIVES TO POWER.

Wrong About the Right

JEAN HARDISTY AND DEEPAK BHARGAVA

The now dominant narrative about the right's rise to power holds that conservatives invested huge amounts of money in a number of think tanks over the past thirty years and brilliantly framed their messages in ways that were simple and resonated deeply with much of the American public. By embracing a top-down, hierarchical movement structure and relentless message discipline, the right was able not only to triumph at the ballot box but also to change the very terms of political discussion—demonizing "big government" and celebrating "tax relief," "personal responsibility" and "free-market capitalism."



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

This account of conservative strategy has piqued the interest of a growing number of progressive groups, who argue that the left should adopt a similar strategy. And it is currently driving the activities of many major progressive donors.

The difficulty here is that, as an explanation of the right's ascendancy, it is at best incomplete and at worst misleading. What's more, it is not clear that progressives should emulate all of the right's tactics, or that we will succeed by doing so. There are certainly lessons to be learned from the right—but for the most part they are different from those commonly assumed. Here is an alternative view of the insights progressives should take away from three decades of conservative domination.

Secrets of Their Success

(1) *Ideological Diversity.* There is no monolithic "conservative" movement but rather a plethora of ideologies successfully harnessed together in a grand coalition. In the 1970s, as the New Right emerged from the discredited old right, a fragile truce was drawn among libertarians, economic conservatives, social conservatives and neoconservatives. Under the leadership of William F. Buckley Jr., editor of the influential *National Review* magazine and host of TV's *Firing Line*, tensions were negotiated and a "fusion politics" emerged that allowed for cooperation across differences. Such a truce is more easily maintained when a movement is winning, as the New Right was under President Ronald Reagan. Now, in George W. Bush's second term, the fault lines are reappearing.

The implication for progressives is that we ought to tolerate a diversity of views and think strategically about how to align them to common purpose rather than seek a homogeneity we falsely ascribe to conservatives. Conservatives also found that it's not always the most mainstream or moderate voices who win. Likewise, progressives with a more radical vision, while working collaboratively in the larger movement, must not let themselves be sidelined.

(2) *Ideas, Not Messages.* To the extent that conservatives were serious about ideas—and to be sure they were and are—they started not with "messaging" or "framing," two strategies currently in vogue among progressives, but rather with inquiry into core beliefs about race, government, family, markets and global economic and military domination. These core beliefs were at first far outside the mainstream of accepted political discourse. But by carefully constructing an ideological blueprint for their movement (despite lack of complete buy-in from every sector), the right has been working for more than twenty-five years with a set of unifying ideological principles to which their strategists and activists return time and again. Support for "family values," limited government, a strong military, white domination and the primacy of Christianity over other religions, when combined with a will to power, have served the right well.

On the left many intellectual projects are more tactical in nature and avoid asking fundamental questions—not about how we talk but about what we actually believe. For instance, we are at our best when fighting a reactionary policy or program, such as tax cuts for the wealthy or attacks on voting rights. But progressives are not unified, or even clear, about what we affirmatively want in terms of a role for government, a just economy or rights for individuals and groups.

(3) *Active Listening.* It is often noted that the structure of the conservative movement is hierarchical and that because the leadership has such a high level of control, conservative campaigns have always been well coordinated and executed with great precision. Less often noted is that their masterstroke was not that they went off in a room and decided on a few cornerstone values and then aligned their work and campaigns to speak to those values. Their genius was that they first engaged in a practice of active listening and found a core of resentment among large numbers of Americans—about race, class, gender and sexuality—that could provide the emotional base for a new intellectual paradigm. They did this in the 1970s, at precisely the time when liberals stopped listening, presuming that the reactionary ideas of the old right were so far out of favor that only the most uninformed and backward voters supported them. Today, liberals rely heavily on polling—a shallow kind of listening—or push ideas at the country without deeply engaging with people first.

(4) *The Importance of Recruitment.* Think tanks and their output of ideas, analysis and information are a necessary but not sufficient component of any effective social movement.

Jean Hardisty, president emerita at Political Research Associates, is a senior scholar at the Wellesley Centers for Women. Deepak Bhargava is executive director of the Center for Community Change.

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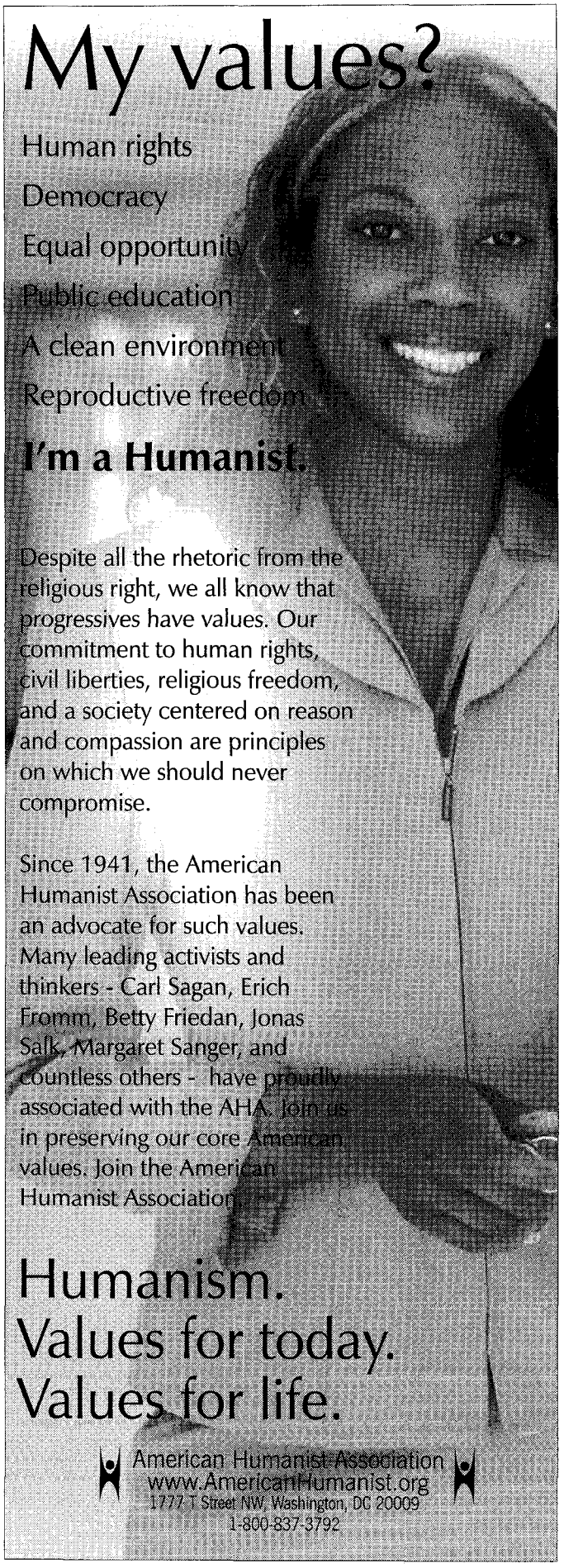
Conservatives focused on building powerful mass-based institutions that could provide muscle for a conservative agenda, such as the National Rifle Association, the Moral Majority, the American Family Association and, later, Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America and the Christian Coalition of America. Many of these mass-based organizations were explicitly Christian and played a vital role in recruiting evangelical and fundamentalist Christians to the New Right of the 1980s.

Further, the right's core leadership showed extraordinary creativity in exploiting new technologies. For example, Richard Viguerie pioneered the use of direct mail; Ralph Reed Jr. of the Christian Coalition developed "stealth" methods of campaigning for political office without revealing the candidates' actual right-wing agenda and used churches to mobilize voters. The right's strategists focused not only on ideas and policies but also on organizing a base and developing recruitment techniques to build the base. The contemporary right has always been clear about the importance of recruiting greater numbers to its movement. An examination of right-wing campaigns reveals that, in nearly every case, the opportunity for recruitment plays a central role in their conceptualization and execution. Progressives would make a tragic mistake by neglecting base-building in the current period.

(5) *Electoral Politics as Means, Not End.* The architects of the right's rise to power did not view their project as the election of Republicans to state and federal office. They perceived the Republican Party as a tool to achieve certain ends, rather than as the end in itself; the takeover of the party was important because it would turn the country toward a reactionary agenda. That the takeover occurred is a reflection of the potency of the strategy. This is crucially important because some progressives tend to conflate the project of building a just world with the project of electing Democrats to office. Winning people over is our central task. After all, progressive advances do not always come under Democratic administrations. It was Richard Nixon, after all, who proposed a guaranteed annual income for the poor, while Bill Clinton approved time limits on welfare benefits.

It's also important to remember that the right worked at the federal, state and local levels and used both "inside" and "outside" strategies to influence the realm of political office-holding and the terrain of public opinion. No one aspect of movement-building was emphasized at the expense of others. It is that strength—approaching movement-building as a whole package—that explains much of the right's growth and effectiveness.

(6) *Fearless Politics.* The right has not been afraid to propose extreme positions, knowing they will be pushed back to more moderate ones still well to the right of the status quo. We've seen this in almost every policy fight since 1980. By boldly taking stands that are far outside the mainstream, the right has managed to pull the mainstream to the right, which is why it is now perceived as speaking for the majority. For progressives, meanwhile, timidity, ambiguity and constant compromise have not proved successful strategies; projecting a clear, principled and uncompromising voice of progressive values and policies is not only morally compelling but strategically smart.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Learning From Our Own History

Historically, left and liberal agendas—the New Deal, civil rights laws, the Great Society, women's advancement—have made progress when mass movements have forced change. To be sure, the ideas of John Maynard Keynes were crucial in legitimizing and pointing the way to a new form of capitalism and FDR was the right leader for the times, but the New Deal wasn't won by economic experts. It was won by ordinary people who organized to create a sense of crisis and a mandate for change.

While there is no formula for a social movement, we know that successful ones share some things in common. First, people become mobilized around issues they hold dear; at some level they share a powerful vision about what is wrong with society and how it must be improved; and they engage in lots of diverse activities not under any one leader's direct control. The resulting political motion and its effect lead to a change in attitudes, practices and public policy.

Our current infatuation with the strategies and structures of the right has led some progressives to call for a more streamlined, hierarchical movement, but this is not how we've won in the past. Progressive movements have been successful when they have not had a top-down organizational structure. Also, this analysis fails to appreciate the comprehensiveness of the right's movement-building style. And it does not reflect progressive democratic principles. Consider, for example, the civil rights movement. Despite the popular perception of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s singular importance, the movement had many sectors under many leaders, with different ideologies and different priorities—people like Septima Clark, Ella Baker and Bob Moses, all of whom believed in the centrality of developing ordinary people as agents of change rather than in charismatic leadership or coalitions of elites. The same could be said of the women's movement and the environmental movement. Progressive movements certainly need a generally agreed-upon critique of society and vision for change, as well as mechanisms for coordination. But letting a thousand flowers bloom can prove a strength, so long as power does not collect around the most "achievable" social change as opposed to the most just social change.

Race and Social Change

A movement must have a dynamic leading edge before its positions become majority positions. Many of the progressive gains in American history were not majority agendas—ending slavery, civil rights, disability rights, AIDS advocacy and farmworker boycotts succeeded as struggles led by minorities. In some cases they were struggles led by people who weren't even enfranchised. How is that possible?

Often, deeply felt issues raised by groups whose numbers are in the minority have the power to convert, while issues that theoretically should be in everyone's interest never take hold. A necessary (though not sufficient) condition for an issue to attain broad majoritarian support is vibrant, well-organized submovements. Many of our submovements, such as the women's, environmental, LGBT and civil rights submovements, are demoralized, underfunded and increasingly influenced by their own more conservative wings. Further, the progressive movement's tendency to downplay racial issues and concerns consistently blocks our process of building from submovements' success to an effective broad progressive movement. For instance, even though African-Americans have been the core of progressive politics, it is often African-Americans who have been taken for granted and neglected by the progressive movement, which is too often white dominated and focused on issues of concern to white activists. As long as the movement fails to become more inclusive and democratic, it will continue to limp along without access to the wisdom and insight of the most vital part of its base. Race today is not simply a matter of black and white: Many other groups and movements of immigrants—Latinos, Asian/Pacific Island–Americans, Arab-Americans and Native Americans—must also have a full seat at the table. Conservatives are avidly courting these groups. When people of color look for allies to advance their issues, there is no reason to assume they will support the larger progressive movement when their issues receive only lip service and they are not widely represented in the movement's leadership and decision-making structures.

This is not only about "credibility" or "diversity." It is actually about effectiveness. The whiteness of our leadership has played out, for example, in a tendency to write off large parts of the country—including the South, the Southwest and the High Plains—which has proved politically disastrous. Further, a predominantly white leadership tends to neglect issues like immigrant rights and criminal justice because they are not pressing concerns of the "majority" of voters. The perception that an issue can't galvanize a wide majority or appeal to at least 51 percent of the electorate can sink the issue in the current climate of poll-driven strategizing. Certainly the progressive movement needs to pursue programs that knit together diverse constituencies, but even very broad issues such as healthcare or the environment will look different when they reflect the concerns of all communities.

The Role of Organizing

Some progressives consider grassroots organizing a remnant of an old style of politics no longer relevant to our media- and money-saturated times. Others think of it as an actual obstacle to the efficient, hierarchical infrastructure they idealize. But conservatives have nurtured their grassroots constituencies in civic institutions, evangelical churches and gun clubs. Organizing is central to any effective strategy for revitalizing the progressive movement.

Organizing, not to be confused with mobilizing, is ultimately what changes people's minds. Whereas mobilizing is about moving people to take certain actions (voting, lobbying policy-makers, coming out to an event or calling your Congress member on an issue pre-selected by someone else), organizing is about developing the skills, confidence and practice among ordinary people to speak out in their own voice.

What ultimately forces change is human beings seeing fellow human beings act from a place of deep conviction. That moment of recognition can occur only when people who are living with an injustice bring their experience to the public square. Of course, solidarity efforts are crucial to social change.

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It's hard to imagine the farmworkers, or the civil rights workers in the South, succeeding if they had failed to rouse broader sympathy throughout the country. But they were able to do this only because they spoke with an authenticity that transcended walls of race and class prejudice. No policy paper or slick message will ever replace the power of organizing.

Major changes in the social order require a leap of "nonconsent" by the governed. That might be millions of people refusing the draft, or thousands boycotting buses in Montgomery, or hundreds "dying in" to protest delays in AIDS research. While the tidal wave of conservative successes at the federal level is obvious, the less-obvious victories progressives have had in recent years are largely attributable to organizing: major new investments in affordable housing through housing trust funds, new money for transit, living- and minimum-wage laws, expansions in health coverage at the state level, more income supports for low-wage workers, education access, driver's licenses for immigrants and limits on natural resource extraction.

Organizing is, as George W. Bush might say, "hard work"—never more so than in current circumstances. Memories of successful collective struggle are fading fast among a new generation not raised with the 1960s as a backdrop. Market culture has penetrated all spheres of life, and it has reinforced deeply individualistic strains in American society. Also, pervasive economic insecurity, increasing work demands and a shredded safety net have heightened the personal costs involved.

Organizing has always had an uneasy place not only in the broader culture but also in progressive circles. It has frequently been sidelined by expert-driven advocacy or by charismatic figures who lead short-lived protest movements, and today it is at risk of being displaced by a focus on think tanks and communications strategies. Perhaps more alarming, however, is the relative decline of organizing as a strategy relative to mobilization. The work of many 527 organizations prominent in the Bush and Kerry campaigns of 2004 (America Coming Together and the Media Fund, for example) seemed to be about parachuting into communities and soliciting votes, with little thought about what would be left behind.

For all the difficulties, progressives are engaging in some exciting experimentation with new methods of base-building appropriate to our times. Organized labor is in the throes of a debate about how to rebuild membership. There has been an explosion in community-based "worker centers" and in immigrant community organizations. And in a few states, groups are beginning to work together across issue and constituency lines to develop common long-term strategies. This success is very fragile and tentative, however, and it is still the case that organizing tends not to get the respect, attention or resources it needs from the larger progressive community.

A problem closely related to the neglect of organizing is the failure of many progressive organizations to recruit and encourage leadership from young people, especially young people of color. Young people have political, social and economic perspectives that differ from those of older (usually Baby Boomer) activists, who were shaped by the events of the 1960s and '70s. Younger activists, organizers and intellectuals will enrich the movement and take it in new directions, if given the freedom and the power to do so.

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Clarifying Basic Principles

While the focus of progressive movement-building is now on creating large organizations "to scale," yet another of the movement's greatest challenges is being neglected: We are undecided on the larger principles that underlie our work for social justice. Many people don't like to do this "big picture" thinking. They prefer results-oriented activism and practical solutions. And they are correct that larger principles must be tied to people's everyday concerns and identifiable, attainable goals.

But to be successful, mass organizing must be informed by visionary principles as well as nuts-and-bolts techniques. Most bold new policy proposals grow out of the everyday work that activists in submovements do on various issues. These proposals—for example, national healthcare, full rights and services for immigrants, or replacing the racist criminal justice system—are not the polished, poll-tested, slightly left-of-center ones increasingly attractive to Democratic Party centrists. Indeed, they may seem fringe and far out of the mainstream. But they have their roots in real material conditions.

What we lack are the overarching principles to tie these proposals together. In the 1960s and '70s progressives generally agreed that government had a responsibility to defend the weak or temporarily weak, protect individual rights, provide a reasonable standard of living and regulate private enterprise to protect the public from rampant greed and criminal behavior. Battered by the right's relentless assaults on these core principles, progressive movement activists today do not have a coherent vision. Instead, we are driven by a vague sense of what a better society would look like, a recognition of how times have changed and persistent despair as we fight one defensive battle after another.

It is therefore essential that we address several fundamental questions right now: What is the role and responsibility of government? How can the racial imbalance of our movement's leadership be corrected? What role should religion play in public life? How should progressives respond to globalization? And what social issues should we identify as "bottom line"? As principles that respond to these questions emerge, we must not allow political expediency to trump creativity. The voices of people of color, and young people and women of all races must be explicitly sought out. Funding may facilitate this discussion, but it will not in itself produce a dynamic vision. Think tanks alone will not develop these principles, and framing and messaging will not substitute for them. The process of drawing out larger principles must be an organic one: a step-by-step process of slowly creating broad consensus. Here, we can learn from the right's success with active listening.

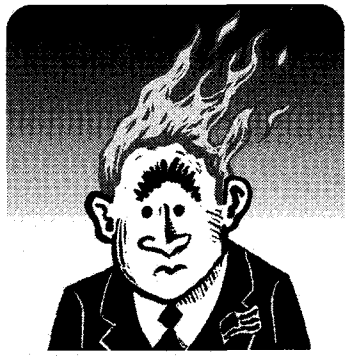
While the challenges we face are considerable, they are not insurmountable. But we must get moving so that when the tide of public opinion turns in our direction, we are not caught flat-footed, with a movement badly in need of reform and lacking the very basics needed to seize the moment and go forward. The right was ready for the backlash of the late 1970s. We must be ready for the coming backlash against the outrages of the past twenty-five years. ■

AN ELDER LITERARY STATESMAN HOLDS FORTH ON THE STATE OF THE NATION.

Gore Vidal, Octocontrarian

MARC COOPER

Gore Vidal remains one of the more prolific contemporary American writers and certainly one of the most politically outspoken. Shortly after his recent 80th-birthday celebration, Nation *contributing editor Marc Cooper interviewed him in his Hollywood home. Herewith, a condensed version of that conversation. A longer version, in both audio and text, can be found at www.thenation.com.* —*The Editors*



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Q: In the introduction to your new book, *Imperial America*, you begin by saying that the four sweetest words in the American lexicon are "I told you so." What were you gloating about?

A: Oh, everything. The principal bit of wisdom that I had to purvey, which I got from Thomas Jefferson and he got from Montesquieu, is that you cannot maintain a republic and empire simultaneously. The Romans couldn't do it. The Brits could only manage it up to a certain point, but then ended up going broke. The Venetians were an empire, and the United States. And in each case the republics were lost. Starting with our war against Mexico in 1846, which was to acquire California, we've been in a serious, naked grab, grab, grab imperial mood.

Q: In that respect, how different is the Bush Administration? Anything new here, or part of that same historical arc?

A: Well, a lot is different. The machinery is all changed. Nuclear and bacteriological weapons exist. We can kill a lot more people. But there have been things unimaginable to me and most Americans—that we would have a government that is absolutely in your face to every country on earth. We have insulted everybody.

Q: We now see that House majority leader Tom DeLay has been indicted. The Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, is under investigation by the SEC. We've seen the debacle around Michael "Brownie" Brown and FEMA. Is this Administration finally collapsing under its own weight?

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A: "Under its own lack of weight" [*laughing*], I think, is the phrase you are searching for.

Q: Sort of the unbearable lightness?

A: Yes, the unbearable lightness. Or here DeLay—gone tomorrow. Yes, I do believe it is breaking up. And the indictment of DeLay would not have happened had there not been two hurricanes, which dramatized to everybody in the United States that we don't have a government. And to the extent we do have one it is not only corrupt but a menace to other countries, to our liberties, to our Bill of Rights.

Q: If, indeed, this Administration is collapsing for lack of weight, what comes after it?

A: Martial law, that's next. Bush is like a plane of glass. You can see all the worms turning around in his head at any moment. The first giveaway of what's on his mind—or the junta's mind.

Q: The junta being...?

A: Cheney, who runs everything, I suspect. And a few other serious operators. Anyway, I first noticed this was on their mind when Bush finally woke up to the fact that the hurricanes were not going to be good PR for him. And he starts to think friends of his are going to be running in '08. So what's the first thing he does? The first thing on the mind of a dictator? He gets the National Guard away from the governors. The Guard is under the governors, but Bush is always saying, Let's turn it over to the military. This is what's on their mind. Under military control.

Q: Are you predicting a coming military dictatorship? And that the American people would stand for that?

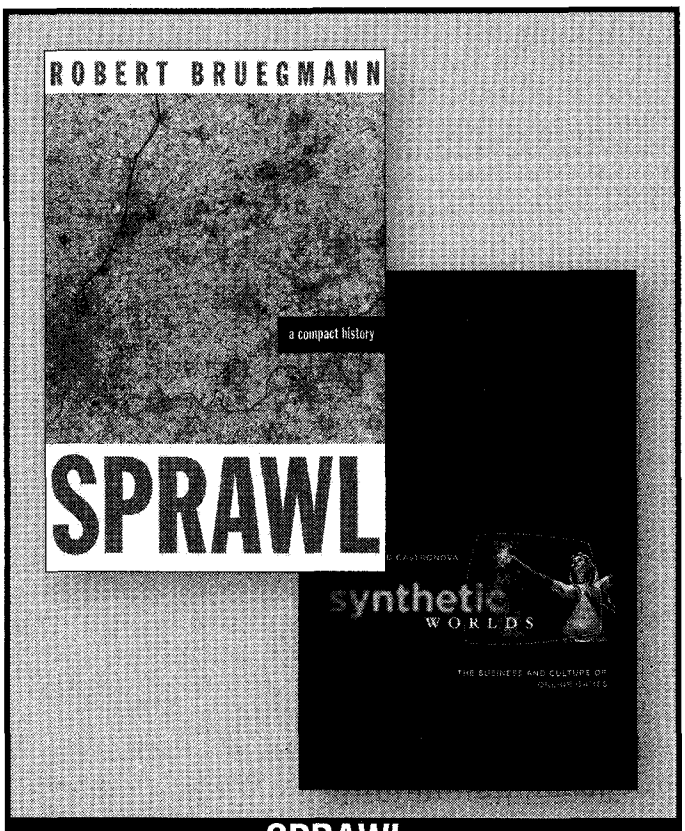
A: They'll stand for anything. And they will stand for nothing. I deal with a lot of European journalists who are very well versed in American politics. But they will ask me silly questions like, "So, Kerry didn't turn out very well. So who's the next leader of the opposition who can become President?" I answer, Well, first the *New York Times* won't interview him. He won't get on prime-time television if he looks like a winner. That's out. Or he will be made a fool of, like they did with Howard Dean when they amplified his famous cry. That was all done at CBS to make him look like a maniac. They are very resourceful! So if you have a media that is completely controlled by corporate America—or whatever phrase you want to use to describe our rulers—no information is getting through that is useful to the public. No White Knight is going to be acknowledged in the press or seen on television. He would have no way of connecting with the people. And this a permanent fact in our situation.... If there could be a viable opposition to the oil and gas junta that has seized power—all three branches of government, I think—it will have to be at the grassroots. Then you will have to find a way of publicizing through the Internet the White Knight—or the Black Knight, whoever comes along to save us.

Q: What are three or four main things the White Knight would have to say to motivate us, in your words, to keep the Republic?

A: First of all, we should be allowed to keep the money we earn. Because most of us are heavily taxed.

Q: That's what the Republicans say.

A: That's what they say, but they don't mean it. What they mean is, "We people who have money, we don't want our children to pay any inheritance tax. We don't want our huge



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incomes to be taxed. We don't want the profits of our big corporations ever to be taxed." And they've pulled all that off. When you run against them, you have to say the profits on corporations are going to be taxed. As they always were. The people understand this. And if they don't, you can explain it in ten minutes.

Q: What would the White Knight do with the military?

A: Cut its budget in half. That would save us a lot of money. We could rebuild a lot of levees. We don't need it.... We can't win a war anymore. They can't bring back the draft. We are at end times now for this regime. Just keep your fingers crossed we are not at end times for our country....

Q: One area where things seem to have improved in America concerns homophobia. Gay marriage can now be discussed in polite company.

A: I don't know that it much matters as a theme. Talk to anybody in the military and it's just as bad as when I spent three years in the Army during World War II and those suspected of same-sex activities were Section Eighted out or locked up. It was bad then, and it's bad now. An issue like gay marriage just keeps homophobia alive.

Q: So you're not an advocate of it?

A: No. I know to what purposes that issue is put.... You get an issue, like gay marriage, which doesn't concern 99.9 percent of the population, and you go on and on and on about it. Proving that the Democrats are all crazy, if not all queer. Someone wants to get married, fine. What's it to me?

Q: If we pick a point forty years ago, in the middle of the 1960s, when you were half your age, did you think then the United States would take the course it eventually did?

A: I never thought the President would dare to favor preemptive war. I never thought it would come to this, a sort of maniac for President who goes around attacking verbally and physically any country he wants. The ownership of this country has usually been pretty shrewd. They knew what they wanted. They don't want to pay taxes, certainly. They don't want people blowing them up in the night like 9/11. And if there ever was great cause for impeachment it would be over 9/11. Never been a case of negligence like that.

Q: You are not possibly suggesting that the Bush Administration allowed this attack to go ahead?

A: No. I'm not saying anything even close to it. If there had been some sort of wicked collusion between elements of our government and the 9/11 team from Saudi Arabia, in a country like ours, by now, at least two of them would have been on television talking to Barbara Walters. That's what kind of country we have. We can't keep secrets. No, it's unthinkable. Whatever was behind 9/11 was well worked out. And there isn't a brain in this Administration that could have worked out something like 9/11. Either to prevent it or to do it. ■

THE DEMS SORELY NEED A WIN IN THE SOUTH. THEY JUST MIGHT GET IT IN VIRGINIA.

Kaine Country

JOHN NICHOLS

Tim Kaine is a graduate of Harvard Law School, a savvy legal advocate who made a name for himself working with the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups to battle housing discrimination, and a multilingual world traveler who responds to questions with references to Federico Fellini's films and Mario Vargas Llosa's novels. But on a hot late-summer afternoon in the dusty southwest Virginia town of Galax, which seems about as far from Harvard Yard as an American can travel, Kaine was making no references to his best-and-brightest legal training, nor to foreign films. Instead, he was blowing a harmonica with the fellows who'd gathered at Barr's Fiddle Shop, cranking out a foot-stomping rendition of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." As he campaigns for governor of Virginia, in the most critical of the November 8 off-year elections for the battered Democratic Party, Kaine is making like a good ol' boy, wheeling around Virginia in a Dodge Dakota pickup truck, quoting Bible verses, shouldering a 12-gauge shotgun, announcing, "I enjoy shooting skeet" and playing that harmonica for all it's worth.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Kaine, the state's lieutenant governor, is in a tight contest with former Republican Attorney General Jerry Kilgore. If he succeeds in making a down-home connection with the retired coal miners and laid-off textile workers who are the critical swing voters of Appalachian Virginia, Kaine will do more than merely win the governorship of one of the most politically complicated states in the nation. He will give national Democrats something they want, and something they sorely need. The something they want is a strong start in the intense competition to fill the increasingly powerful and politically influential governor's seats in the thirty-eight states holding elections over the next year. If Democrats win the two races in play this year—Virginia and New Jersey, where Democratic US Senator Jon Corzine maintains a narrow lead over Republican Doug Forrester—and a solid majority of the thirty-six contests to be decided in November 2006, as now seems possible, they will reverse more than a decade of Republican dominance at the state level. They will also begin to position the party as a more broadly competitive player in 2008—the "national party" that Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean keeps talking about. But to do that, Democrats must also secure the "something they sorely need" part of the equation: a major win in a Southern state.

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The Democratic Party has been in decline in the South for a long time. But until the Bush years, that decline came in fits and starts that always left room to argue that the party could still compete in a region where working-class whites and African-Americans, as well as burgeoning Latino and Asian immigrant populations, have seen the "no-new-taxes, no-new-programs" approach of conservative Republicans speed the decline of rural economies, the loss of key manufacturing industries and the crumbling of healthcare and education systems. But since 2000, when George W. Bush secured the electoral votes of every state of the old Confederacy—reversing the progress Arkansan Bill Clinton had made in 1992 and 1996—Democratic fortunes in the South have been dismal. The party lost the governorships of South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama in 2002 and of Mississippi in 2003. In 2004 Democratic Senate seats in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Louisiana fell to the Republicans, while Bush gained not just his electoral-vote margin but a popular-vote cushion that more than offset Democrat John Kerry's strength in the rest of the country.

The setbacks of recent years have renewed conversations among insiders regarding the old suggestion of the late Paul Tully, one of the Democratic Party's most respected strategists, that Democrats should simply abandon the South and build on their base in the rest of the country. Even before the setbacks of 2004, University of Maryland political scientist Tom Schaller penned a widely circulated commentary in which he suggested that Democrats simply "stop trying" in the nation's largest region. "Moving forward, the Democrats would be better served by simply conceding the South and redirecting their already scarce resources to more promising states where they're making gains, especially those in the Southwest," argued Schaller, whose views are frequently echoed in the quiet councils of Democratic leaders—councils that include fewer and fewer Southerners.

In this year's race for the DNC chairmanship, Dean drew early and unexpectedly enthusiastic support from party activists in Alabama, Mississippi and other states across Dixie by pledging, "The Democratic Party will not give up on the South." This fall's Virginia gubernatorial race is a key test of that promise. The DNC has chipped in more than $1.5 million—the party's biggest contribution to its big-city mayoral or gubernatorial candidates this year, and one of its biggest ever—to the Kaine campaign, which is also drawing strong support from the Service Employees International Union and other labor groups. John Edwards, the former North Carolina senator and 2004 vice presidential nominee, has campaigned for Kaine, as have Senator Barack Obama and Gen. Wesley Clark; former President Clinton is scheduled for a late-October visit. A scaled-down version of the Media Fund, the 527 group that spent tens of millions trying to elect Kerry and other Democrats in 2004, is on the ground working to increase turnout in Virginia's Democratic strongholds, including the Washington suburbs and urban centers such as Hampton Roads and Richmond, where Kaine formerly served as mayor. Turning out reliably Democratic voters is critical, in a state that is more evenly divided than its electoral history at the national level would suggest.

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Virginia was the first state of the Democratic Party's old "Solid South" to begin regularly voting Republican for President, in 1952, and since then it has backed only one Democrat for the nation's top job: Lyndon Johnson in 1964. In the 1990s it appeared that the Democrats might be finished in Virginia. For the first time in history Republicans won every statewide elective post in 1997; two years later they took control of both chambers of the state legislature. But a strange thing happened in 2000. Strong support from the rapidly growing and increasingly liberal suburbs of Washington made Democrat Al Gore reasonably competitive in the presidential race, winning 44 percent of the vote statewide. At a time when much of the South was going Republican, Virginia was showing the first signs of a Democratic tilt. A year later, in 2001, Democrats Mark Warner and Kaine were narrowly elected governor and lieutenant governor, respectively.

A telecommunications millionaire elected on a "run Virginia like a business" program, Warner was able to forge a governing coalition of Democrats and moderate Republicans. In 2003, faced with a budget shortfall that threatened already-squeezed education and healthcare programs, not to mention its bond rating, Warner began pushing for $1.5 billion in tax increases. Conservatives screamed, and some Democratic strategists, the same folks who are always telling national Democrats to be cautious, worried aloud that the move would hand the GOP an issue. But the gamble worked. Virginia now has a triple-A bond rating and a budget surplus that has allowed Warner to move money into transportation initiatives—a big deal in and around the hellish Washington Beltway—and the cleanup of Chesapeake Bay.

With an unprecedented approval rating of 76 percent, Warner would be a cinch for re-election this year if Virginia were not the last state in the country that limits governors to a single

Sweeping Up Ohio

No state in the nation has been rocked by more political scandal in the past year than Republican-controlled Ohio, where a prominent GOP fundraiser—a Bush Pioneer, no less—was revealed to have been handed $50 million from a state program for injured workers to invest in a scheme to buy rare coins. Then it came out that the state's Bureau of Workers' Compensation had lost $225 million after investing in high-risk hedge funds, including one managed by a major Republican contributor. Governor Bob Taft claimed to know nothing about the deals, but he's since been convicted of four misdemeanors for failing to report $6,000 in gifts from backers, including the coin dealer.

The scandals have finished off Taft politically and imperiled many of the other Republicans who currently control every state constitutional office and both houses of the legislature. But savvy Ohioans recognize that getting rid of the current crew will not fix the broken system that made possible one-party dominance of a state where the 2004 presidential election revealed a nearly even partisan split—and it won't fix the cronyism and corruption that go with such dominance. "The time is ripe for reform," says Scarlett Bauder of the independent grassroots group Reform Ohio Now. And RON, with backing from independents, renegade Republicans, progressive Democrats like US Representative Sherrod Brown, organized labor and religious groups, has seized the initiative. Over the summer RON activists collected more than 520,000 signatures that put four constitutional amendments on the November 8 ballot. If enacted, the amendments will represent what many observers believe will be the most sweeping clean-up of politics in any state since the Progressive Era reforms of almost a century ago.

Contemporary progressives have often been skeptical about taking the referendum route. After all, some of the ugliest assaults on civil society—from California's draconian Proposition 13 back in the 1970s to the anti–gay marriage measures in recent years—have taken the form of citizen-sponsored initiatives. But referendums also provide an opportunity to force progressive reforms that legislators are unwilling to make. In Ohio the four RON amendments would make it easier to vote by allowing all Ohioans to cast ballots by mail; place strict new limits on campaign contributions; put a bipartisan Board of Supervisors in charge of Ohio's scandal-plagued electoral system; and end the traditional practice of allowing legislators to draw their own district lines—and those for the US House of Representatives—by putting an independent commission in charge of the process.

Unlike this fall's redistricting referendum in California, where Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger wants to give line-drawing responsibilities to a bipartisan panel of judges, the Ohio proposal is all about democracy. It would create an open competition for new district maps—with the winners being those who come up with the most competitive "swing" districts. "It would bring Ohio politics to life," enthuses the *Dayton Daily News*, "creating contests where there are none now."

Ohio Republicans who have taken full advantage of the current system are understandably unenthusiastic about this move to restore competitive politics. So, too, are Congressional Republicans like former House majority leader Tom DeLay, who are acutely interested in maintaining a system that has allowed their party to enjoy a 12-to-6 partisan advantage in the state's US House delegation. An anti-reform group, dubbed Ohio First, is running a big-budget campaign to defeat the referendum proposals. Republican state representative Kevin DeWine, a spokesman for Ohio First, admitted early in the process that "I won't tell you we won't try to raise money out of Ohio." Contribution reports indicate that most of the group's money is indeed coming from non-Ohio sources.

The package of reform proposals has also attracted national attention from progressives—particularly those frustrated by reports of unequal access to the polls, flawed voting machinery and inaccurate counting procedures that arose during and after the close 2004 vote giving that state's electoral votes and the presidency to George W. Bush. "As we have seen with the presidential election in 2004, what happens in Ohio affects the whole country," says Representative John Conyers Jr., ranking Democrat on the House judiciary committee and author of a scathing study of the state's dysfunctional electoral system. "The culture of corruption that exists there is an injustice to our democratic system of government.... That is why the vote in Ohio on November 8 this year is of historic national importance."

JOHN NICHOLS

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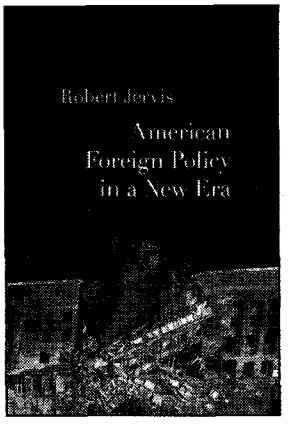
four-year term. So as Warner toys with a 2008 Democratic presidential run, Kaine is promising to carry on. "People are happy with the way the state is being run," says the Democratic nominee as he touts the accomplishments of what he dubs the "Warner-Kaine Administration." But even with the popular Warner on the campaign trail for Kaine, and even with Kilgore stumbling badly by first trying to avoid debates and then refusing to answer questions about his platform once he was dragged to the podium, the race is a dead heat. Kaine is running well in Democratic areas, while Kilgore is using a big bankroll and aggressive backing from Republican Senator George Allen (a former governor with 2008 presidential ambitions of his own) to stoke up the Republican machine with an antiabortion, anti–gun control message—and with a brutal television assault on Kaine's acknowledgment that, as a Catholic, he is personally opposed to the death penalty. Though Kaine has said he would permit executions as governor, and Virginia newspapers have ripped Kilgore for stretching the truth to the breaking point, the attacks have taken their toll in a state that, after Texas, has the highest number of executions in the nation.

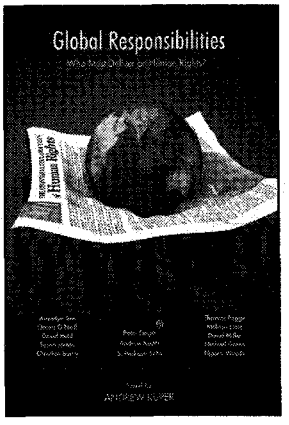
The race is complicated by the independent candidacy of Russ Potts, a Republican state senator who draws comparisons with John McCain and Ross Perot and has taken stands to the left of Kaine on some gay-rights and spending issues. Potts won't win—he's polling below 5 percent and has been excluded from the key debates—but he remains popular with editorial-page writers and country-club Republicans. No one is quite certain whether he will draw more votes from Kilgore or from Kaine. What is certain is that Kaine will not be elected governor unless he can hold his own in southwest Virginia, a "swing" region where traditionally Democratic voters are pulled in opposite directions by a yearning for populist economics and deep social conservatism.

Which brings us back to the harmonica. "Democrats need to do well in the southwest, but that isn't always easy," says United Mine Workers of America legislative director Bill Banig. "A Democratic candidate has to spend a lot of time in that part of the state, build up the comfort level." Southwest Virginia's coal mines and textile mills once made the overwhelmingly rural part of the state friendly to trade unionism and populist politics. But the shuttering of the mines and the devastating impact of free-trade agreements on the manufacturing sector have complicated the area's politics. "A good Democratic message on economics—creating jobs, helping farms—can still play well there," says Banig. "But the social issues, the gun issues, they can definitely pull in the other direction." Thus, while the southwest elected a Democrat to Congress—Rick Boucher, who frequently earns 100 percent ratings from labor organizations—it gave Bush landslide margins in 2000 and 2004.

In 2001 Warner ran well in southwest Virginia with a campaign that emphasized pocketbook economics and the right to bear arms. Kaine is trying to re-create the strategy, but it's harder for him than for Warner, who had never held public office and thus had no record for Republicans to attack. Kaine also lacks the wealth that allowed Warner to introduce himself to rural Virginians by spending millions of his own fortune to help promote high-tech development in the state's poorest regions. Where Warner sponsored a NASCAR race team to break down cultural

Timely Insights





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barriers, Kaine has added a values twist. To the extent that the generally prochoice and pro–gay rights Democrat addresses social issues, says the University of Virginia's Larry Sabato, "Kaine's language is conservative, Christian, rural." His stump speech and radio ads recall his missionary work in Honduras in the late 1970s, and announce that "faith is central to my life." The message is sincere: A devout Catholic, Kaine has a deep devotion to the church's social gospel on poverty and debt-relief issues. But it is also politically advantageous, and this is one Democrat who refuses to cede the "values" turf to the opposition.

Kaine will not draw the votes of rabid social conservatives away from Kilgore, a favorite of antichoice groups like the Virginia Society for Human Life (which regularly repeats the comically inaccurate claim that "Kaine is the most liberal candidate in the history of Virginia"). The hope of Democrats is merely that Kaine's "faith in action" message, along with his ability to add a nice harmonica line to gospel tunes, will earn their nominee a hearing from swing voters who need a comfort level with Democrats before they will listen to economic messages. If Kaine has built that comfort level by election eve, he may be pulled across the line by Cecil Roberts, the fiery populist president of the mine workers union, who plans to take a swing through coal country with the Democrat. Roberts made a similar swing with Warner in 2001, a mission that is credited with helping the urbane northern Virginia Democrat carry southwest Virginia counties on the way to a narrow 52-to-48 victory.

If Kaine wins on November 8, it will not be a case of magic striking twice; it will be a case of Democrats beginning to unlock the code of the South. Doing so will not prove that the party is indeed the national force that Dean and others trumpet. But it will suggest that, as Bill Banig argues, "Democrats don't need to write the South off, they need to figure it out. And when they do figure out how to talk to people, when they make the effort to connect with them, Democrats can still win." ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

egy can give the left a powerful way to intervene in partisan general elections, which are clearly a large part of even "blue" New York's politics. Massachusetts, on the other hand, is almost entirely "blue." With Republicans a tiny minority in both houses, our legislature is virtually a Democratic monopoly in which the party label loses ideological focus. That's why we count votes here as progressives versus conservatives. And that's why our electoral strategy is focused on the Democratic primaries, which decide the vast majority of legislative races.

While much of the appeal of a fusion ballot line is about proving that the left is a player in other people's races, our focus on the primaries allows us to win many elections outright. Since 1998 our coalition has increased the number of progressives in the state House of Representatives by thirty-two seats, eight of them in the past year alone. A ballot campaign for fusion could divert our attention from a winning trajectory in which a separate ballot line has little role.

A fusion strategy also runs the risk of draining Democratic primaries of crucial progressive voters. Last year our progressive challenger, Carl Sciortino, defeated Vinnie Ciampa, an incumbent Democrat who opposed equal marriage and economic justice, by only ninety-three votes. Since WFP registrants are ineligible to vote in Democratic primaries, fusion could cost us our margin of victory in tight races.

The WFP is on a roll in New York and the WFA is on a roll here, because we are both committed to building progressive governing power the best way possible: by organizing a broad coalition with a vision that appeals to working people, an organizing program of year-round voter engagement in winnable issue campaigns and a strong electoral strategy that wins elections. HARRIS GRUMAN, *director*
Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts

Nyack, NY

■ As a founder and state committeeman of the Working Families Party I appreciate Alyssa Katz's article, because the WFP needs to get its story out. WFP must become recognized champions of the working and middle classes, stressed by escalating local taxes. New Yorkers pay more local taxes than federal taxes!

In Rockland County, where I live, WFP "fusionized" with independents, conservatives and Democrats, none of whom demanded tax justice. Rockland is typical of suburban and upstate counties, where local taxes double every twelve years. On election day voters who see WFP in fusion with independents and conservatives cannot distinguish us from them. Result: Con-Fusion!

WFP would become a more potent political force if in local elections we were advocates for tax equity, ran our own candidates and showed how more than 80 percent of the taxpayers would save a third to a half by shifting the burden from those with the least to those with the most. IRV FEINER
NATION *reader for seventy-three years*

Somerville, Mass.

■ Alyssa Katz claims fusion voting "sidesteps the Nader effect," but this is true only so long as third parties like the Working Families Party do not run their own candidates. Furthermore, fusion voting is only applicable to partisan elections and, therefore, does nothing to mitigate the spoiling of primaries and nonpartisan local elections.

Instant Runoff Voting overcomes these limitations. Under IRV, voters rank their candidates in order of preference (e.g., first: Nader; second: Kerry; third: Bush), and votes are counted so as to insure that the winner always has a majority of support. Thus IRV allows third-party candidates to run without causing the major-party candidate ideologically closest to them to lose. Plus, unlike fusion, IRV can be used for both partisan and nonpartisan elections. Recent IRV victories in San Francisco and Berkeley, California; Ferndale, Michigan; and Burlington, Vermont, demonstrate that Instant Runoff Voting has far more momentum than does fusion.

Instead of looking at recent elections in New York State, let's look at New York City, where Fernando Ferrer won a six-way Democratic mayoral primary with only a minority of the vote. His low percentage nearly forced a divisive runoff that could have cost the city up to $12 million. Although fusion would be no help here, IRV would consolidate the city's two-stage runoff process into a cheaper, fairer and less divisive instant runoff election.

While fusion is an improvement over simple plurality, progressives should place their electoral reform hopes and energies in IRV (for more details see www.fairvote.org/irv/).
GREG DENNIS

Portland, Maine

■ You quote Maine Democratic State Representative Hanna Pingree as saying her party fusion bill is necessary because "the Green Party has repeatedly spoiled races for Democrats." I don't know about nationally, but here in Maine there is no evidence to substantiate that claim. In fact, exit polls consistently prove the contrary: that of those enrolled in a major party who vote for a Green, about half are Democrats and half Republicans. Voter registration patterns also indicate that the Maine Green Independent Party is composed of as many former Republicans as Democrats and appeals equally to libertarians and conservative Republicans, as well as to socially liberal Democrats. In Maine at least, Greens are not spoilers. BENJAMIN J. MEIKLEJOHN
former chair
Maine Green Independent Party

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By Sarah Churchwell.
Metropolitan. 371 pp. $26.

"Let's hear your speech now, let's hear your speech," an emboldened onlooker barked. It was the morning of April 29, 1945; a reply was unlikely. The firing squad had done its job. Now, dumped off a truck like a waterlogged mattress into Milan's Piazzale Loreto, Benito Mussolini's dead body had been riddled with bullets all over again, stomped upon, spat at, cursed at and urinated on by a mass of his former subjects. One of its eyeballs was lacerated and swelling with fluid. Its cranium was cracked, its cerebellum crushed. Dislodged bone jackknifed through its sinus cavity and palate. And before it was strung up over a gas station by its fat feet, Sergio Luzzatto tells us, someone reached into the static center of that turbulent mob and laid Mussolini's sallow, bald head between the stiffening breasts of his mistress, splayed beside him. This, like everything done in the piazza that morning by Milan's fuming citizenry, betrayed one implacable assumption: that the sting of sarcasm would not be lost on a dead body.

Death has long occupied a special place in the publishing industry's staple crop of biographies: the end. But the rules of biographies are rapidly being stretched or tossed out entirely. Abstract ideas are now fair and compelling subjects, as in Charles Seife's *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*; so are inanimate objects, as in Holley Bishop's *Robbing the Bees: A Biography of Honey*. Luzzatto, a professor of history at the University of Turin, the author of four previous political histories and a regular commentator for Italy's two major daily newspapers, has breathed a new, peculiar life into the form by writing the biography of a corpse. *The Body of Il Duce* shows Mussolini as a man who, in becoming an inanimate object, also became an abstract idea. Death is only this story's beginning.

There has never been a shortage of dead bodies in the world. Yet Luzzatto couldn't have delivered what is presumably the first dead-body biography at a more suitable or more energetic moment in the cultural history of cadavers. Dead bodies have suddenly become the life of the party. It's a regular *Weekend at Bernie's* out there. Only a few months ago, America was grousing over the living corpse of Terri Schiavo and gushing over the Pope's still-tepid one. In the wake of Katrina, a lone cadaver on Union Street, neglected for days in an abandoned New Orleans, became an indictment of the Bush Administration. It's beginning to seem as though at the center of every shouting match and scandal lies a dead body—stock-still, neither assenting nor objecting.

Two books offer histories from the grave up: the stories of bodies dead but not forgotten, belonging to Mussolini and Monroe.

Mussolini's body led an extraordinary afterlife, worthy of a biographer of Luzzatto's enthusiasm and skill. Born out of bullets, Il Duce's corpse was beaten, hung, buried, exhumed, stolen by neo-Fascists, hunted down, gossiped about, hidden for more than a decade by the Italian government, smuggled out of the convent of Cerro Maggiore in a box marked CHURCH DOCUMENTS and finally in 1957 reinterred—a string of misadventures and minor triumphs engineered, in every case, for someone's political advantage. His was the hardest-working corpse in Italy.

By 1945, when Mussolini's corpse hit that piazza, Italians were already fluent in the symbolic "language of bodies," writes Luzzatto. They had had an early education

Jon Mooallem's essays have appeared in Harper's, The New Yorker *and* Salon, *where he recently wrote about a touring exhibit of human corpses.*

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in the subject with the brutal assassination of Giacomo Matteotti, Mussolini's early Socialist rival, in 1924. Fascists beat Matteotti to death and, after sexually assaulting his corpse, unloaded it in the woods, where it lay undiscovered for two months. (Within days of Mussolini's execution, rumors spread that Matteotti's son had slipped into the ranks of the firing squad to avenge his father's death.) The popular memory of this body tainted Mussolini's

ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM

Mussolini and mistress, 1945

reign, just as the dead body of Mussolini haunted Italy as the nation tried to reinvent itself after World War II.

Even a decade after Mussolini's death, Luzzatto explains, a fledgling postwar neo-Fascist movement tried to resurrect its hero by organizing bus pilgrimages to his grave site, "putting Il Duce's body to work in the 1958 election." Ultimately, he adds, "Il Duce's body seemed to be as ubiquitous as the dictator had been in life." Luzzatto portrays the body as an ungainly reminder of much of what Italians would have preferred to forget and were horrified could be revived. "He is an obstacle, even if he has been defeated," wrote the imprisoned pundit Giovanni Ansaldo after Mussolini's capture. "He can still harm us."

As it happens, only weeks after Mussolini's body swung over the crowds of Piazzale Loreto, advertising its own end, the very buxom, very young Marilyn Monroe was being photographed in her breakout modeling session. Norma Jean Mortensen had been discovered at her place of work, an airplane plant in Southern California, by a photographer from the Army's First Motion Picture Unit. Selected to be part of a series on women pitching in on the homefront—pics meant to inspire, or simply titillate, GIs overseas—she was recruited as an instrument of the war effort. Norma Jean's body would fight Fascism, if only indirectly, and—as the desecration of Mussolini's corpse made clear—it would win.

After her short and by all accounts difficult life, Monroe came to an end as lonely as Mussolini's was spectacular: She died at home alone on a Saturday night. As one journalist put it, "The girl whose translucent beauty had made her the 'love object' of millions of unknown lonely or unsatisfied males had no date that evening." Her body lay unclaimed in a crypt of the Los Angeles morgue for hours as "Case #81128." It's easy to imagine that crypt as her own private Piazzale Loreto, the most demoralizing form of violence that could visit a star like Marilyn Monroe—the violence of not being noticed. Her body, finally naked again, was in death of no interest to anyone. It evoked nothing, and no one cared, until the mob—of writers—began to gather.

Indeed, Sarah Churchwell's new book makes clear that what Italy physically did to Mussolini has been done figuratively to Monroe slowly over the past forty years by her many biographers and critics. Monroe's death in 1962 triggered a gold rush for memoirists, scholars and scandalmongers who, sometimes without even realizing it, appropriated her mystique for their own agendas. Though *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe* is concerned with more than just the corporeal, it's remarkable how often Churchwell finds Monroe's biographers going right for her body like so many mad coroners. Monroe's gait, her scars, her abortions, her sexual likes and dislikes, her hair color, her experiences of molestation or rape, even the circumstances of her death—all become irresistible inspirations for riffing. Churchwell surveys this glut of Marilynalia—from Norman Mailer's "novel biography" *Marilyn* to Joyce Carol Oates's "biographical novel" *Blonde*—bouncing the accounts off one another to bring their blind spots and exaggerations into sharper focus. She searches for truth in the composite, and what emerges is more a truth about American celebrity and possession than about any one woman.

A dead body—an ordinary dead body, that is—is a fleeting, unmemorable thing. But somehow each of the bodies Luzzatto and Churchwell have seized upon has endured, continuing to absorb all the gender, pop-culture and party politics thrown at it. That's the thing about extraordinary dead bodies: They're hard to get rid of but so easy to push around.

Be it Bush's swagger or Schwarzenegger's pecs, the body can be a commanding political symbol, even in a supposedly enlightened democracy. But a totalitarian government, Luzzatto argues, hinges even more explicitly on the concise localization of power in the frame of its chief. The power invested in Mussolini's corpse, he implies, was merely leftover energy from the storehouse built up during his twenty-three-year reign.

Having been wounded in World War I, Mussolini used his body as a badge of courage to help him in his rise to power. Alive, he was an austere boulder of a man—the Ox of the Nation, as he called himself, tethered to all of Italy, tilling and towing and charging. He spoke with his body ("swiveling his eyes, contracting his jaw so his lower lip jutted out, spreading his legs, and putting his hands on his hips") and was eager to be seen and photographed shirtless. But the man exuded nakedness even when fully clothed, and many journalists of his time wrote about Mussolini's body in unabashedly sensual terms. "We rip off the clothing," one journalist lavishly opined—writers of course could do nothing else in Fascist Italy—"going after the inimitable essentialness of this Man, who vibrates and pulsates

HULTON GETTY PHOTO ARCHIVE/NEWSCOM

The lonesome death of Marilyn Monroe, 1962

with formidable humanity." And the women apparently couldn't get enough. A few postwar revisionists would try to explain away Fascism, in part, as (in Luzzatto's paraphrase) "the place where female ignorance and Mussolini's cult of the phallus met."

Monroe's success and magnetism were even more wrapped up in her body—and the men couldn't get enough. Clothed, she also exuded nakedness, mostly because virtually everyone in America had actually seen her naked and few could shake the image. In 1953 *Playboy* dug up "Golden Dreams," a nude photo Monroe had posed for years earlier as a nobody, and published it as the magazine's first centerfold, just as her first sexified, show-stopping

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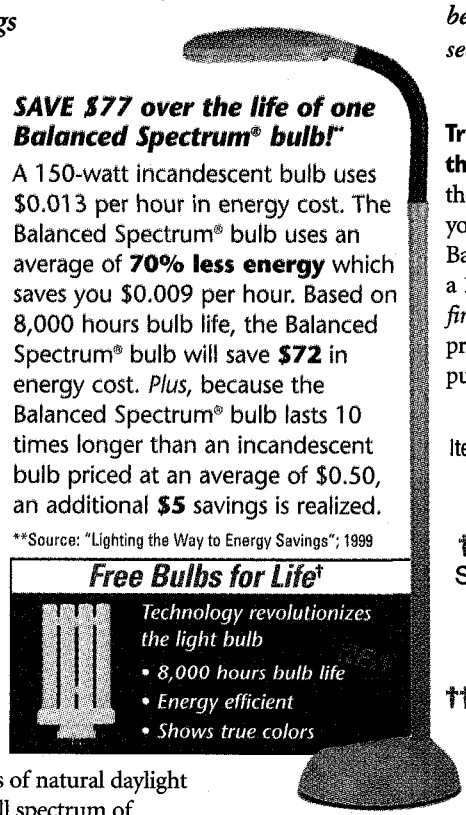

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roles—in *Niagara*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*—were hitting screens.

Naked or not, she was the "very Stradivarius of sex," according to Mailer, who imagined Monroe entangling her poor first husband, even at the age of 15, in her "insane sexual musk." Churchwell rebukes him for such sumptuous tunnel vision, notably for freely fabricating, in *Marilyn*, a conversation between the young actress and a studio executive about her anus, but failing to "imagine scenes of Monroe reading Dostoyevsky, meeting Carl Sandburg, or attending literature classes at UCLA, all of which she actually did." Oates pulls a similar trick, inventing a vivid threesome between Monroe and two actors on a beach and manufacturing an epiphany for young Norma Jean out of double penetration.

These authors were undoubtedly so cavalier about taking liberties with Monroe's body because it was always seen as free for the taking. Questions about its exploitation arose at the very beginning of her career. And they lasted to the very end: Even Monroe's coroner cashed in by publishing his own book, *Coroner to the Stars*. "In essence, the anxieties about Marilyn Monroe's body all relate to the problem of ownership," Churchwell writes. "Who owned Marilyn Monroe's body, who controlled it, who gained access to it?"

In life, the bodies of Monroe and Mussolini had swept up and coerced millions of people, and yet they always kept those people at an enchanting, authoritative distance. Screenwriter Nunnally Johnson described Monroe as a "phenomenon of nature, like Niagara Falls. You can't talk to it. It can't talk to you. All you can do is stand back and be awed by it." But this was, of course, not the same as the menacing fear and rapture Italy felt in the presence of its leader. Fascist underlings and cineplex crowds are clearly not one and the same; after each body went suddenly limp and that hypnotism evaporated, the severity of what was at stake in the debates surrounding them was altogether different.

Luzzatto shows Mussolini's death releasing Italians to wonder how and why they had let themselves be carried away—into World War II and to a bitter collapse—on the shoulders of that strapping Atlas. A rich catalogue of writing emerged to provide explanations—memoirs and amateur histories by ex-Fascists, screeds by resurfacing liberals and that very peculiar document, "Mussolini's Political Testament," which, Luzzatto writes, "had all the characteristics of a religious relic, being a photographic reproduction of the typed copy of Il Duce's final interview." Later, he adds, "Mussolini's life after death thus relied on diagnoses dredged from memory or created out of whole cloth."

Those who wanted to preserve Il Duce's majesty had their work cut out for them. The image of his capture was not a flattering one. He'd hidden under a blanket, disguised in a Luftwaffe overcoat, and was dashing off to Switzerland with purses full of several currencies—"not to mention his girlfriend," one anti-Fascist noted, who "had stuffed precious stones into the seams of her underwear."

Undermining Mussolini's legacy, by contrast, wasn't very difficult. Mussolini's corpse was an emblem, after all, a hunk of bloated flotsam washed up as the political tide swiftly changed. Fascism and Nazism were in their death throes everywhere. An entire political system was being discredited and regretted. Luzzatto notes how the killing in Piazzale Loreto proved a canny perversion of Il Duce's fervent mass rallies in Rome's Piazza Venezia—an adoring mob now a vicious mob, the taunt of "Let's hear your speech now" calling up his extraordinary prowess as an orator, and "a body attacked with fury both equal and opposite to the passion it inspired when alive." After hanging there like a side of meat, Italy's Ox was suddenly rumored to have been syphilitic, impotent and meagerly endowed between the legs. "When the leader dies," Luzzatto writes, "the myths so vital in his lifetime are turned upside down; the charisma is transformed into a deep flaw."

Within days of his death, the Italian dictator was rumored to have been syphilitic, impotent and meagerly endowed between the legs.

Monroe's demise, conversely, signaled the rise of a system, that of the American *über*-celebrity. Still, Churchwell finds a similar pattern: Monroe's makeup artists and confidants warped what were once promoted as her virtues into deep flaws, even shame. Her beauty, they wrote, was all cosmetic trickery, her success the result of cocksucking careerism. "In public, Marilyn Monroe's beautiful body is understood to have been for sale and was supposed to be the reason for her phenomenal success," Churchwell writes. "Biographies just keep inverting this truism to create surprising 'secrets' about Marilyn: her body was for sale in private, too."

The central question of post-Monroe Monroe-mania emerges, again and again, about who was manipulating whom. Was she "really" the innocent Norma Jean or the calculating Marilyn? These personas have almost always been perceived to be mutually exclusive; indeed, Oates and feminists like Kate Millett and Gloria Steinem have all treated them as separate characters in their writing, and a recent HBO film cast them as two separate actresses.

Versions of Monroe's death divide along these lines, too. Writers either recount the death of a victim or of a victimizer. Mailer and Oates—and a slew of less estimable conspiracy theorists—have her assassinated by CIA operatives. (Many tales have Monroe done in by toxic enema; Oates's Sharpshooter uses a lethal injection, though he conspicuously enters her house "from the rear.") In these scenarios, Monroe is usually portrayed as hopelessly in love with Bobby Kennedy, spurned and threatening to go public with their affair. (Churchwell is convinced the affair is apocryphal.) Sometimes she's even pregnant with Kennedy's child or privy to classified cold war information. Here is Norma Jean the victim, naïvely bouncing her way into a malevolent political conspiracy and ultimately being "done to" because of it rather than "doing."

Suicide, the conventional explanation for her death, can be seen as the opposite, a calculated move by a more domineering Monroe. Churchwell argues for suicide as a "performance, as a work of art" in which the body is finally extinguished by the mind with which it has been at war, although suicide can also be read as the tragic, pitiful apotheosis of decades of subjugation. "If ever there were a victim of society, Marilyn Monroe was that victim," Ayn Rand wrote. Ultimately, Churchwell writes, "each of these endings concludes its own plot, and each plot differs in key respects—yet they all insist that theirs is the true story of Marilyn Monroe's life."

Our instinct for narrative, it seems, leads us to want the death of public figures to suitably punctuate the life. If we have to invent that death, so be it. For what we love is not the dead bodies but the vicarious thrill of repossessing them and watching them die again and again and again. As Churchwell puts it: "It's the process we enjoy, the journey from power to punishment, from beauty to fatality."

Il Duce's bloodied body was eventually carted away from Piazzale Loreto

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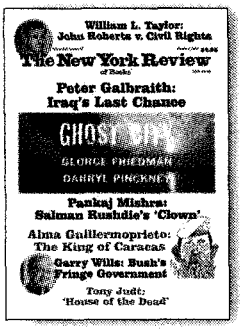

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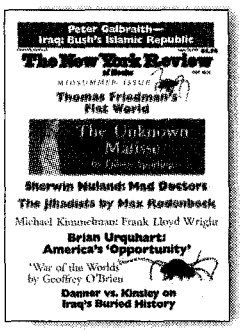

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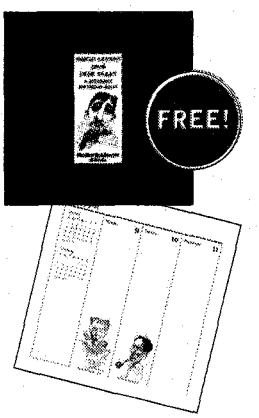

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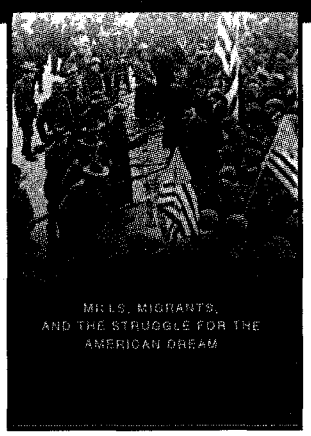

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and, years later, many Italians came to denounce the bedlam in the square. They were sheepish about having moved from frenzied adulation to the frenzy of revenge, from giving in once again to such a visceral impulse. Many feared it made them and their nation appear savage or unserious.

Shots of Mussolini's strung-up corpse ran on the front pages of American newspapers alongside austere photos of President Roosevelt, who had just died—a pairing quickly read as American sophisticates and Italian animals. Giovanni Ansaldo and rival journalist Gaetano Salvemini debated what "higher mercy" ought to be extended by a recovering Italy, even to its battered Ox. Mercy, it seems, was an option only because Mussolini had been so thoroughly debased.

The lone surviving photo of Marilyn Monroe's corpse, taken just after her autopsy, remains a piece of pop-culture contraband—somehow more taboo, more reeking of filthy exploitation, than the nude photos taken when she was alive. Anthony Summers, who published it in his book *Goddess*, quotes the coroner's assistant: "She didn't look good, not like Marilyn Monroe. She looked just like a poor little girl that had died."

What emerges from the studies of both of these bodies is a sense that death, even for the extraordinary, is the great normalizer. Dangling between two other Fascists, as Christ was flanked by two common thieves, Mussolini was "not alone," writes Luzzatto, a fact that "showed that his fate was no different from the fate of the others; ultimately there was nothing special about his body." ■

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THE ACCIDENTAL MASTERPIECE: On the Art of Life and Vice Versa.
By Michael Kimmelman. Penguin. 245 pp. $24.95.

Is there anything accidental about masterpieces? Thinking so can lead to the old myth of natural genius—"Picasso couldn't paint a bad picture"—as well as to the easiest condemnation of modern art—"my 4-year-old could paint that Pollock." Certainly artists draw on native gifts, but what they really need is looking and thinking, training and working, and no doubt Michael Kimmelman would agree.

His elegant book of essays takes on a slightly different topic: the masterpiece that stems from the accident. For Kimmelman, chief art critic for the *New York Times*, these epiphanies come in a few kinds. Accidents can lead indirectly to masterpieces, as with the chance meeting of French Post-Impressionist Pierre Bonnard with Marthe de Méligny, the waifish girl who became his muse for some 400 paintings. Accidents also determine masterpieces directly, as when the unexpected trapping of the ship Endurance, during the Antarctic expedition of Sir Ernest Shackleton, inspired photographer Frank Hurley's best work. And accidents can be revalued as masterpieces over time, as with some amateur snapshots and strange collections discussed here. Kimmelman stresses not only how workaday events can "catalyze" great art but "how creating, collecting, and even just appreciating art can make living a daily masterpiece." Hence his subtitle: *On the Art of Life and Vice Versa*.

The ten essays of the book fall into contrapuntal pairs. We visit two painters, Bonnard and the contemporary American realist Philip Pearlstein, in whose intimate scenes of domestic existence being and working are bound closely together. Kimmelman also considers two less fortunate figures for whom "life was an art": Ray Johnson, the American collagist who, before his late suicide, turned everyday scraps into witty works, often in the form of postcards to well-known acquaintances, that both frustrate communication and seek it out; and Charlotte Salomon, a young German-Jewish woman who, before her death in a Nazi camp, transformed her rather humdrum life into a diaristic drama of some 1,300 pages of images and texts titled *Life? or Theater? A Play With Music*. We hear, too, about two characters another age would call primitives: Hugh Francis Hicks, a Baltimore dentist who

Hal Foster is chair of art and archaeology at Princeton University, and the author of Prosthetic Gods *(MIT).*

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amassed 75,000 light bulbs and related objects in his Museum of Incandescent Lighting, which allows Kimmelman to reflect on the art of collecting; and Bob Ross, longtime host of the public TV series *The Joy of Painting*, who permits Kimmelman to consider the art of the amateur. Two texts on adventuring are also included, the first featuring Hurley on the Endurance expedition near the South Pole, the second starring the author as a reluctant hiker in the South of France. The book concludes with meditations on the ordinary and the extraordinary in art: one on various painters, from the French master Chardin to the American contemporary Wayne Thiebaud, who focus on "simple pleasures," the other on the most grandiose of earthworks, the *Roden Crater* project of James Turrell in Arizona and the *City* project of Michael Heizer in Nevada.

This dialectic of the mundane and the exceptional is central to Kimmelman's argument, and wonder is its key. "Just as art promises wonderment, an access to a realm beyond the everyday, through the experience of which we may understand the everyday better," he writes in his essay on the light-happy Hicks, "a collection of things, even everyday things, promises wonderment, too, as these things become no longer everyday." This interest leads Kimmelman to touch on the *Wunderkammer*, the cabinet of curiosities favored in European courts before the epoch of the national museum. Essentially this order of things precedes the modern idea of art as a separate, even transcendental category, and in part Kimmelman writes out of a moment that postdates this idea, when art is often folded back into a vast field of "visual culture," a democratic cabinet of curiosities (light bulbs included). He styles his own book as a *Wunderkammer* too.

How can one be opposed to this expansive aesthetic, especially if "its basic democratic message is that these miracles...are accessible to all of us, at almost any time, if we are just prepared to look for them"? And yet, radical though this notion once was in the face of elitist hierarchies of art and taste, it no longer rubs much against the interests of power: Cultural capital is invested elsewhere today. Moreover, important differences might be lost in the move to level out diverse practices. Is the Museum of Incandescent Lighting a masterpiece? It might just be a masterful instance of obsessive-compulsive behavior. Was Bob Ross right to tell millions that "painting will change your life"? That might just be snake oil in a paint tube. OK, what about "wonder"—who could refuse it? Paradoxically, this extreme delight might also flatten different pleasures. After all, we "wonder" at the latest digital effect in the movies, just as we do at the sight of 75,000 light bulbs or the idea of a work of art carved out of a crater. In short, "wonder" might be the common effect of a spectacle culture, democratic only insofar as most of us can now buy some little wonder-fix. In any case, it might distract us from the problems of everyday life as much as awaken us to its mysteries.

Kimmelman is a public art critic, and though he is one of the best, the position has its perils. His thoughts are sincere—no bad faith here—and yet he is led, by task as well as temperament, to populist views that, in an otherwise reflective book, are not much examined. On the one hand he wants to demystify art, to present it as "accessible to all of us"; on the other hand he needs to reaffirm the old belief in its special value, in particular that we are bettered by it. Beneath his new-democratic idea of art, then, lies a classic-conservative philosophy—art is to instruct and to please—and at moments this moral makes the book sound less egalitarian and more anodyne than he would like.

Within this philosophy are embedded two positions, which might also be worked

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over further. Although Modernism is not his subject, Kimmelman gives the old Horatian definition of art a Modernist twist: Great art teaches us "to live life more alertly"; it sharpens our senses and, in doing so, sharpens our sense of being. This is a precept of the Russian Formalists (among other Modernists): Great art renews perception, hardened by artistic convention and social habit, through a defamiliarization of representations that have become automatic. "The process of perception is an end in itself," Viktor Shklovsky wrote in 1917. "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." In Russian Formalism (as opposed to the Anglo-American school of Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg) this artfulness does not separate art from life but rather restores both through renewed contact and close attention. Kimmelman would agree, and sensitivity to the perceptual-ethical nexus of art is the strength of his book. But for some readers it will also be its weakness, for the social dimension of art is only implied in this aesthetic, and its political resonance is faint indeed. Moreover, there is much art between Bonnard and the present that does not aim to instruct and to please, that frankly defies the ethical and the aesthetic. This large category is simply let drop here. For example, "accident" is a Surrealist topos, but for Kimmelman, unlike the Surrealists, there is no nasty unconscious to worry about; artistically speaking, his accidents are all happy ones.

This point leads to the second aspect of his philosophy, one that seems so natural that most of us, Kimmelman included, take it for granted. He writes like an angel, but exactly so, always with an eye to the redemptive: For all his populism, Kimmelman sees art as a process not only of refinement of sense but also of "salvation through sacrifice." As with art that instructs and pleases, this idea of "the redemptiveness of art" is appropriate to many practices but not to all: The earthworks of Turrell and Heizer are indeed about a "redeeming beauty" (that's the problem with them!), but those of Robert Smithson refuse any such spiritual reconciliation through art (Kimmelman passes over Smithson's radical art in silence). More important, this redemptive aesthetic might undercut the main thrust of Kimmelman's own argument. Is to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary truly to serve it? He presents this goal of art as a celebration of life, but this posits life as already in need of redemption, experience as always incomplete. The redemptiveness of art should be defamiliarized (as Leo Bersani suggests in his brilliant *The Culture of Redemption*); even one of its greatest proponents, James Joyce, cut his epiphanies with dashes of disillusionment. Perhaps the way to be truest to "the vulgate of experience" (as Wallace Stevens once called it) is precisely not to inflate its prose—even if one wishes to create "the supreme fiction." As Stevens advises the young poet in his "Notes" to such a fiction: "It is of him, ephebe, to make, to confect/ The final elegance, not to console/Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound."

If I pile on here (Shklovsky, Bersani, Joyce, Stevens), it is because the book is provocative and the stakes are high (well, high for aesthetic debates today). At one point Kimmelman glosses the teaching of John Cage: "Be alert to the senses. Elevate the ordinary. Art is about a heightened state of awareness. Try to treat everyday life, or at least parts of it, as you would a work of art." One can argue with this paraphrase—in my opinion, it is more ameliorative and aestheticist than Cage was, certainly more than his important followers were—but it does represent Kimmelman well. For in his view the exchange between art and life is very benign and rather limited: It issues in private moments of illumination rather than public demands for the transformation of both sides of the equation (such as the Berlin Dadaists and the Russian Constructivists, among others, had made in a different period). Although this is far better than the museum or market fare that most prominent critics offer, it is still avant-garde lite. One is refreshed momentarily but thirsty for far more—perhaps more than our time can deliver. ■

The Blue

heron is gray, not blue, but great enough
against brown-tipped bowed cattails to be
well-named, is known for its stealth, shier
than a cloud, but won't fly or float away
when it's scared, stands there thinking maybe
it's invisible though it's not—tall, gray,
straight as a pole among the cloudy reeds.

Then it picks up one stem leg. This takes time.
And sets it down just beyond the other,
no splash, breath of a ripple, goes on
slowly across the silt, mud, algae-
throttled surface, through sedge grass,
to stand to its knees in water turning
grayer now that afternoon is evening.

Now that afternoon is evening
the gray heron turns blue, bluer than sky,
bluer than the mercury blue-black still pond.
So when did it snag the bullfrog
hanging, kicking, in its scissor beak?
To look so long means to miss the sudden.
It strides around like a sleek cat

from pond to back and back, blue tall bird,
washing the frog, banging it against stones,
pecking almost as if it doesn't know
what to do now that it's caught such a thing.
How fast its beak must be to shoot out
like an arrow or that certain—as it's called—
slant of light. Blue light. Where did it go?

David Baker

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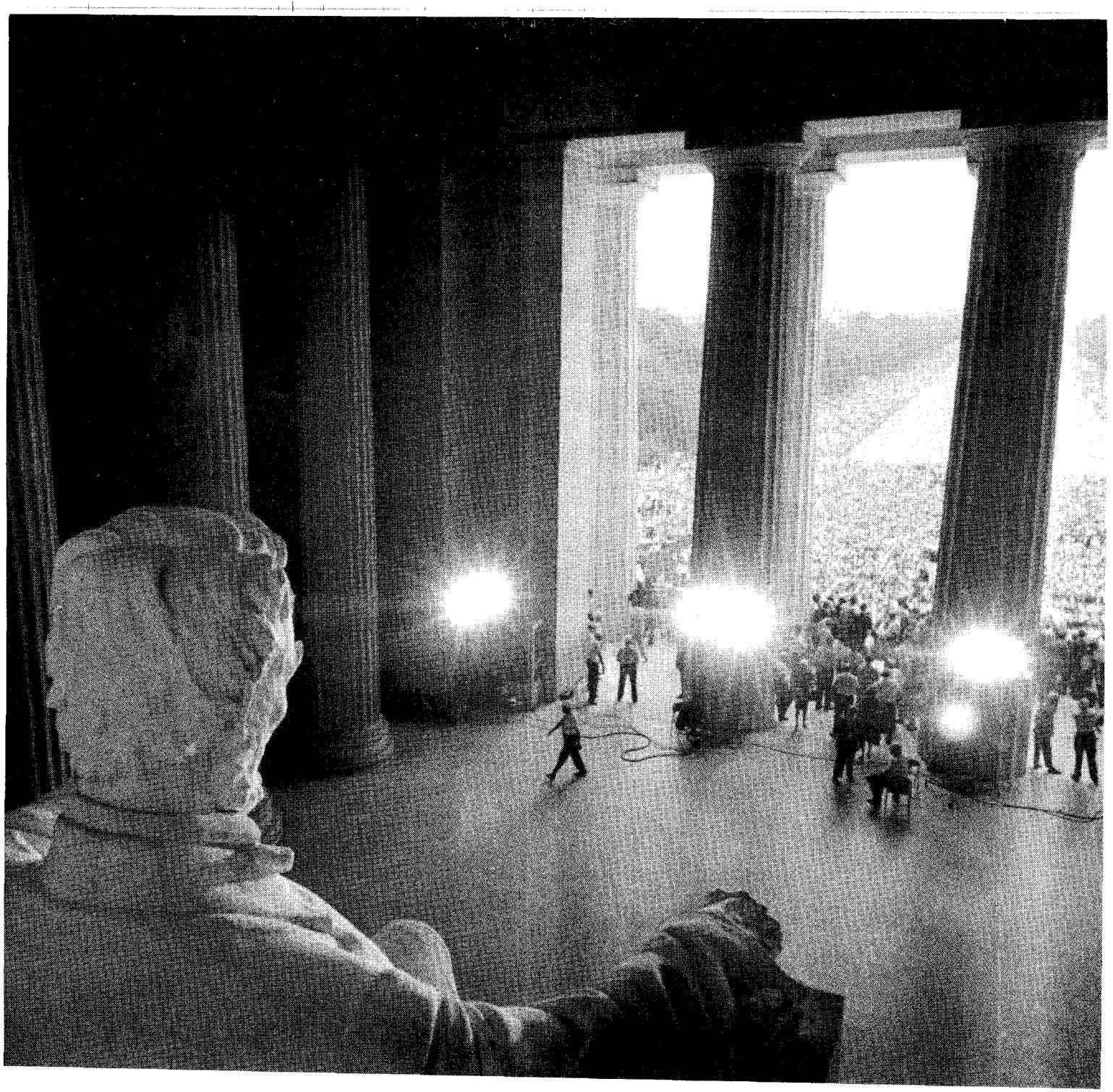

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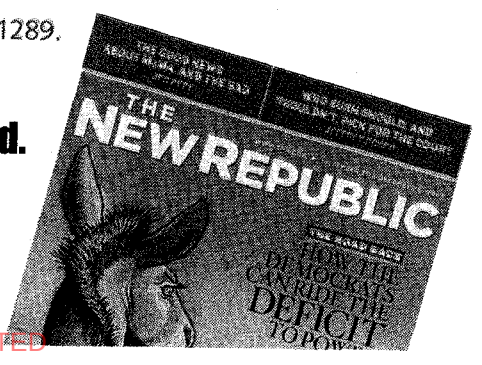

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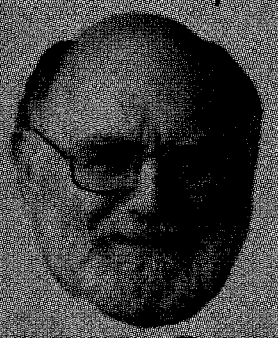

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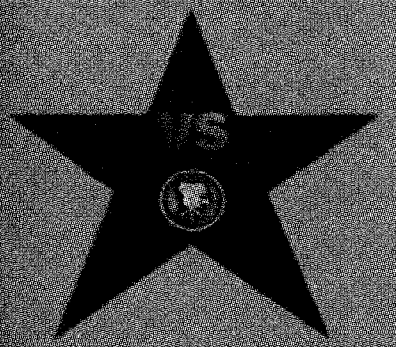

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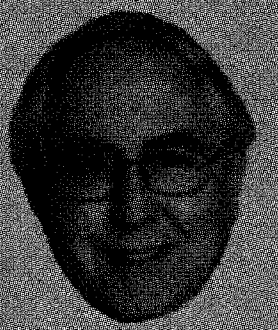

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FILMS

The Young and the Damned

STUART KLAWANS

PARADISE NOW • THE SQUID AND THE WHALE • THE PRESIDENT'S LAST BANG

Khaled is the skeletal hothead with the Richard Widmark sneer. Saïd is more the Clive Owen type: a brooding hunk with soft lips and bottomless eyes. At the young men's place of employment, an auto repair shop, Saïd is the one who tries to talk his way around an abusive customer. "Your bumper was put on straight," he says soothingly. "It only looks crooked because the ground slopes." When this explanation doesn't go over, it's Khaled who steps up with a crowbar to level the bumper by smashing it.

This scene, establishing the characters and social world of two young buddies, might have come from any film in the neorealist tradition, made anywhere in the world over the past half-century. If you've seen more than three such pictures, you can guess what will come next: The friendship will be tested, in circumstances that will include a tentative romance and a run-in with the law. *Paradise Now* fulfills these expectations; but it does more, because the setting is present-day Nablus, the love interest is the daughter of a slain Palestinian militant and the crime is a suicide bombing—or, as Saïd and Khaled think of it, a martyrdom operation.

Directed by Hany Abu-Assad (*Rana's Wedding*, *Ford Transit*) from a script he wrote with producer Bero Beyer, *Paradise Now* is as well researched and responsible a movie as we're likely to get about the who, how and why of Palestinian suicide attacks. Some viewers have faulted the film for assuming the miseries and humiliations of life under Israeli occupation, rather than demonstrating them; others have complained that the film sticks too closely to the experience of Saïd (Kais Nashef) and Khaled (Ali Suliman) and so may excuse their dreadful methods. But most people, I think, will see *Paradise Now* as a great balancing act in which Abu-Assad poses a set of moral and political weights atop his teetering, fallible characters.

As Abu-Assad is quick to state, *Paradise Now* is a movie, not a report or a polemic. In his interviews, including one conducted at *The Nation*, he has explained that the subject of suicide bombing allowed him to combine two of his favorite types of film, the action thriller and "the boring genre" (that is, observational works about daily affairs). Life in the occupied territories is so uncertain, he says, that if you just show people drinking a cup of tea, you've already got a suspense scene. Add a ticking bomb, and the requirements of a thriller are formally met.

By taking this cinephilic approach to his material, Abu-Assad in no way cleared himself of addressing the reality, which is why he prepared for the film by doing extensive research. But he was so determined to work within movie conventions that he insisted on shooting *Paradise Now* on location, in besieged Nablus, using 35mm film—a decision that risked his own neck and the many necks of his crew and ultimately proved unworkable, due to missile attacks and mine explosions and the kidnapping of his location manager. He had to complete the film in his native Nazareth—but by then, Abu-Assad had written *Paradise Now* into the history of impossibly difficult productions, from *Intolerance* through *Fitzcarraldo*.

More important, he had gotten an exceptionally good picture.

The momentum is continuous from very early in the film, when Jamal (Amer Hlehel), a fellow with a professor's corduroy jacket and lecturing manner, draws Saïd down a deserted passageway to tell him that his mission with Khaled is set for tomorrow. To lend support to the volunteer in this joyful moment (and to keep him locked in), Jamal honors Saïd's family by inviting himself to dinner and sleeping over in Saïd's room. You feel as if Saïd has just turned into a bullet in the cylinder. And as you follow the stages of preparation the next day—the transfer to a safe house, the videotaping of a martyrdom speech, the fastening of the explosive belt and dressing of the bombers in inconspicuous suits (so they look like freshly shaved toughs from *Reservoir Dogs*)—everything contributes to the sense of a quick, claustrophobic one-way passage.

Yet neither chance nor choice will go away. By the time Saïd gets to the safe house, he is silently carrying along a sec-

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ond consciousness: his awareness of Suha (Lubna Azabal), who is beautiful and welcoming and has given him something to live for. As the daughter of a famed militant, she has impeccable nationalist credentials; and yet she is a disturbance, too, having recently come to the West Bank from the diaspora, bringing with her a culture and a politics more capacious than anything Saïd has known. Her wide smile and easy talk already make him wobble in the chamber. Then, when mishaps crop up in the mission—from a comically bungled videotaping to a dangerously mistimed rendezvous—Saïd finds himself literally on the loose, traveling through the landscape as an unguided human projectile.

And Khaled? He, too, is under unexpected pressure. Despite a temperament that's ill suited to the task, he has to mollify the furious mission commanders, find his way to Saïd and save his friend's life—temporarily.

So, in its form, *Paradise Now* is about a race against the clock, but also something more. It's about the contrast between confinement and freedom of movement, a contrast that plays out simultaneously as physical, political and moral. Physical, because the action of the movie takes you from cramped streets and piled-up buildings into a space that's so shockingly open it might as well have zero gravity. Political, because Khaled and Saïd say that the Israeli occupation is a "lifelong imprisonment" from which their mission is the only possible jailbreak. Moral, because however much they feel that they have no alternative, decisions always lie before them.

Some of these points emerge in the dialogue. But the remarkable achievement of *Paradise Now* is that the debates and speeches, though urgent, always function as part of a cinematic texture. It's an action thriller; it's a neorealist buddy picture. It's something new in the movies, and extraordinary.

With some movies, you have to be careful not to give away the plot. With Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*, the big question is whether you should give away the metaphor. As a frankly autobiographical drama about a New York divorce—and a peculiar one at that, since so much of the ill will arises from the couple's literary careers—the movie has relatively few narrative surprises to spring on Walt (Jesse Eisenberg), the teenager who is Baumbach's stand-in. The suspense is limited to one question: When will you find out what the title means?

I might as well tell you. In the first place, the revelation won't spoil your pleasure,

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and in the second, Baumbach has used this metaphor before, in his screenplay for Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* (for which the present movie amounts to a decoding). To a child, quarreling parents can seem like monsters of the deep, locked in a deadly struggle.

That Walt, already in high school, still sees his father as some kind of leviathan becomes obvious at the beginning of *The Squid and the Whale*. He worships bushy-bearded, tweedy Bernard (Jeff Daniels), whose confidence in his ability to rank all other writers implicitly puts him at the top of the list. Bernard lords it over Walt (who submits willingly) and the would-be writers in his college class, meanwhile concealing the fact that he's down to receiving two-line rejections for his latest novel. But his wife, Joan (Laura Linney), knows exactly where he ranks and won't let him lord it over her any longer. Her average expression these days has her lips tucked partway back into her mouth, to help her keep down the rage. (It comes out anyway, when she won't accept Bernard's "notes" on her increasingly successful writing.) As for Bernard, he alternates between issuing pronouncements (which are all the more authoritative for being made in a low voice) and exploding into foul-mouthed vituperation.

Bernard likes to think of himself as "elegant." By the end of the movie, Walt will have a different view of him, and of the mother he has so far despised.

Since this is a movie that focuses on two adolescent males—the other is Walt's little brother Frank (Owen Kline)—the upheavals of divorce naturally get mixed up with the upheavals of young groins in heat. So the boys devote a significant amount of screen time to the question of what to do with the fluid once it's been coaxed out, just as they're always trying to figure out where to put their emotions as they shuttle between Bernard's new home and Joan's. With the parents (Bernard especially) having long seemed to be made of words, it's distressing for Walt and Frank to discover that bodies are involved, too, bodies that evidently have demands as pressing as a teenager's.

The Squid and the Whale is about as low-budget a picture as can be put into release these days. Shot on location in Brooklyn, it makes do with a handful of sets and the inside of Bernard's car, and with a cast that's hardly bigger than the nuclear family. (The main augmentations are William Baldwin and Anna Paquin as the new parental love objects, and Halley Feiffer as a classmate who would be Walt's girlfriend if he didn't think himself too grand.) Somehow, the smallness seems appropriate, given Walt's need to shrink his parents to human scale.

Only two aspects of the movie are big: Jeff Daniels's brilliant performance as Bernard (which is expertly judged to make the character a monster, if not one of the deep) and Noah Baumbach's towering pitilessness. He's as hard on Walt as on Bernard; and although he eventually softens his portrait of Joan, he does it only to bring her into the same cold light as the rest of the family.

If he hadn't wanted the metaphor, Baumbach could have called this one *Cruel Story of Youth*.

Over the past decade, South Korean cinema has become a favorite on the art-house and festival circuit, celebrated for being brusque, violent, satiric, political and extravagantly good-looking. You may discover all these qualities, except for the last, in the nastily efficient drama *The President's Last Bang*.

Written and directed by Im Sangsoo, based on the 1979 assassination of President Park Chung Hee, the film unfolds as twenty-four hours of whore-mongering, infighting, officially dispensed brutality, covert plotting and finally (for a long, nocturnal stretch) utter chaos. Some of this is hilarious, in an awful way. Baik Yoonshik (*Save the Green Planet*) stars as the smooth and canny Kim, director of the Korean CIA, whose motives for the assassination (in Im's version) are a mixture of rancor at the belittling of his agency, disgust at Park's dictatorship and despair at his own failing health. Han Sukgyu provides wise-guy, gum-cracking glamor as Kim's chief enforcer. ■

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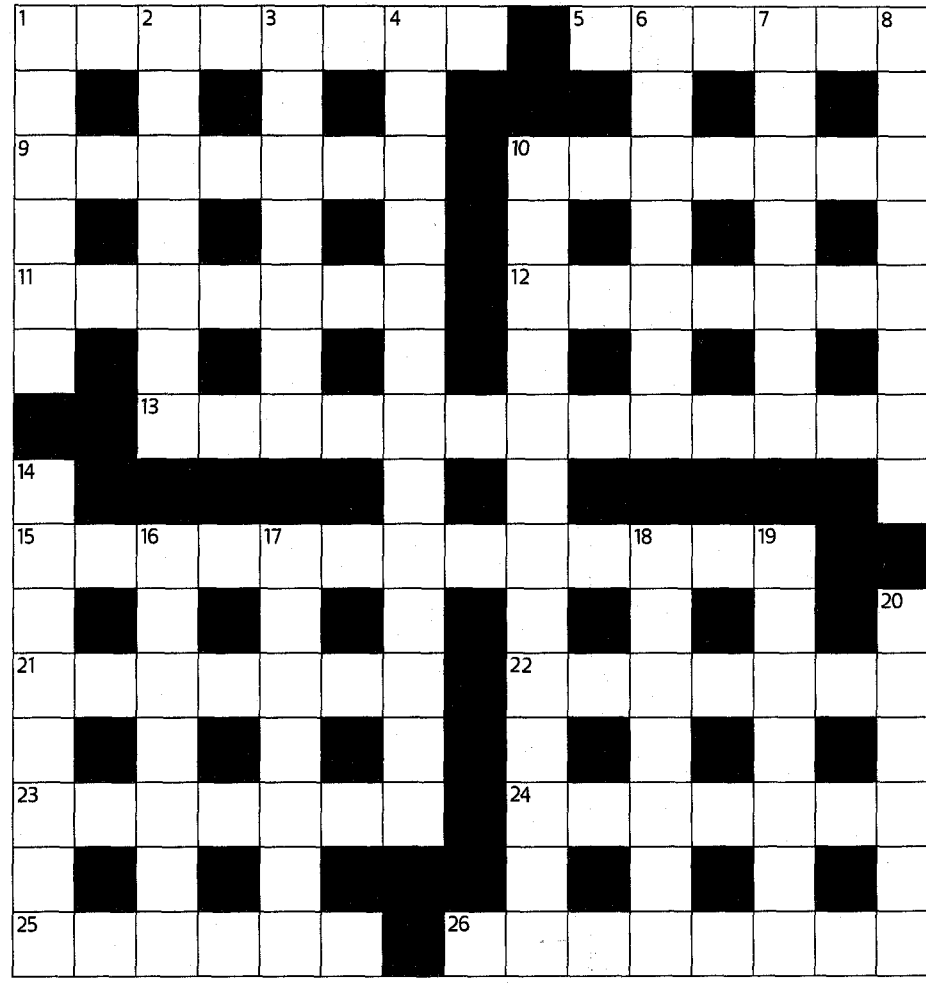
PUZZLE NO. 3008

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Applaud a portion in return—it's a lot of rubbish! (4-4)

5 To make a lot, use this, and make a mess on top. (6)

9 Proving a relative has only a relative beginning, which is not easy to understand. (7)

10 They supposedly ring out, but the awful cost leads to awful sin. (7)

11 Where you might see them running with an informal greeting to a wife of Jacob. (7)

12 Not a good time to meet carriers of hydrophobia, and those from part of the UK. (Cowardly reference implied!) (4-3)

13 People who go out walking with baby buggies? (13)

15 Possibly a sergeant goes to bat with the workers—but they won't fight! (13)

21 They really get beat around sleepy-time, which might get under someone's skin! (7)

22 I do it wrong with a bit less than a hundred, which is crazy! (7)

23 Ol' pal, in the morning it will be like OPEC, for example! (7)

24 One said to be responsible for the lightning takes the water overseas, being also a writer. (7)

25 Queen of Literature, if you like things mysterious. (6)

26 Get a rise past here? That's what the vagabond, or the gad-about, does, possibly. (8)

DOWN

1 Grabbed a fly and a cat, which has a disgusted expression. (6)

2 A right beginning with what might hold things together, but you could make light of it. (3-4)

3 Constellation, being just the thing Goldilocks had to face. (3,4)

4 Supposedly the reward of the righteous, where they pinned a medal on Lincoln. (8,5)

6 A chief source of cola, so it has a point, sort of! (7)

7 Used to be preceded by 23 as a going expression, proving bad kids accomplish nothing finally. (7)

8 Lamb perhaps is served, with a couple of points to talk about, but it's finally wrong. (8)

10 A foreign language has perhaps Oliver over the Queen, like Peter Piper and the rest. (6,7)

14 Start something in it first, when I took something in at last. (8)

16 What preceded King Cole at one time on a mountain that is certainly not flat—or sharp, either. (7)

17 Sandra the jurist or John the cardinal, with nothing to look over or negative denotation ending it. (7)

18 In Africa, a rain storm has something of middling importance in Japan. (7)

19 Their temporary occupation is just a pose, though one of them might be tender, as far as the baby is concerned. (7)

20 They are supposedly always prepared to have Tonto's horse as one of them. (6)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3007

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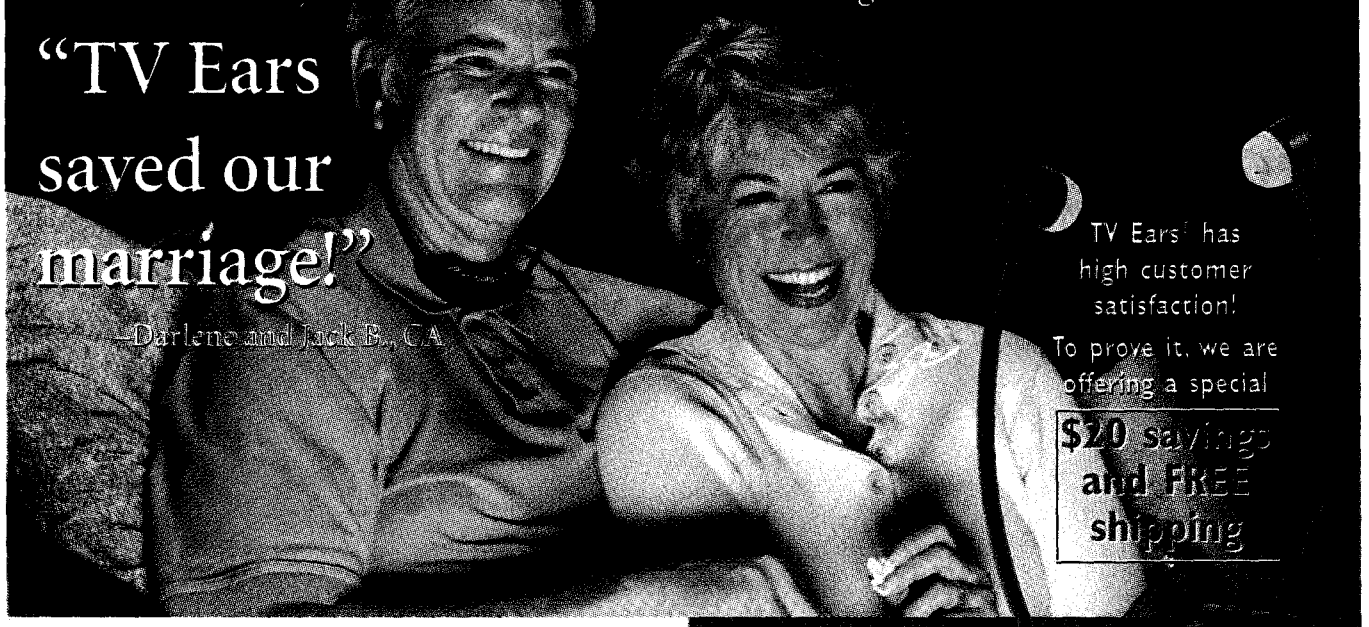

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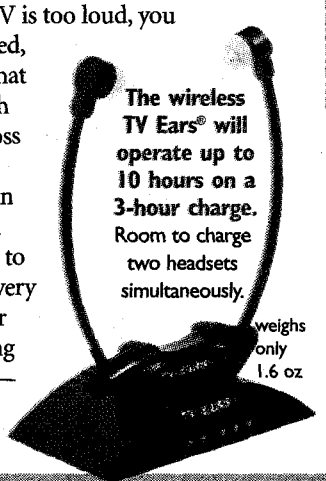

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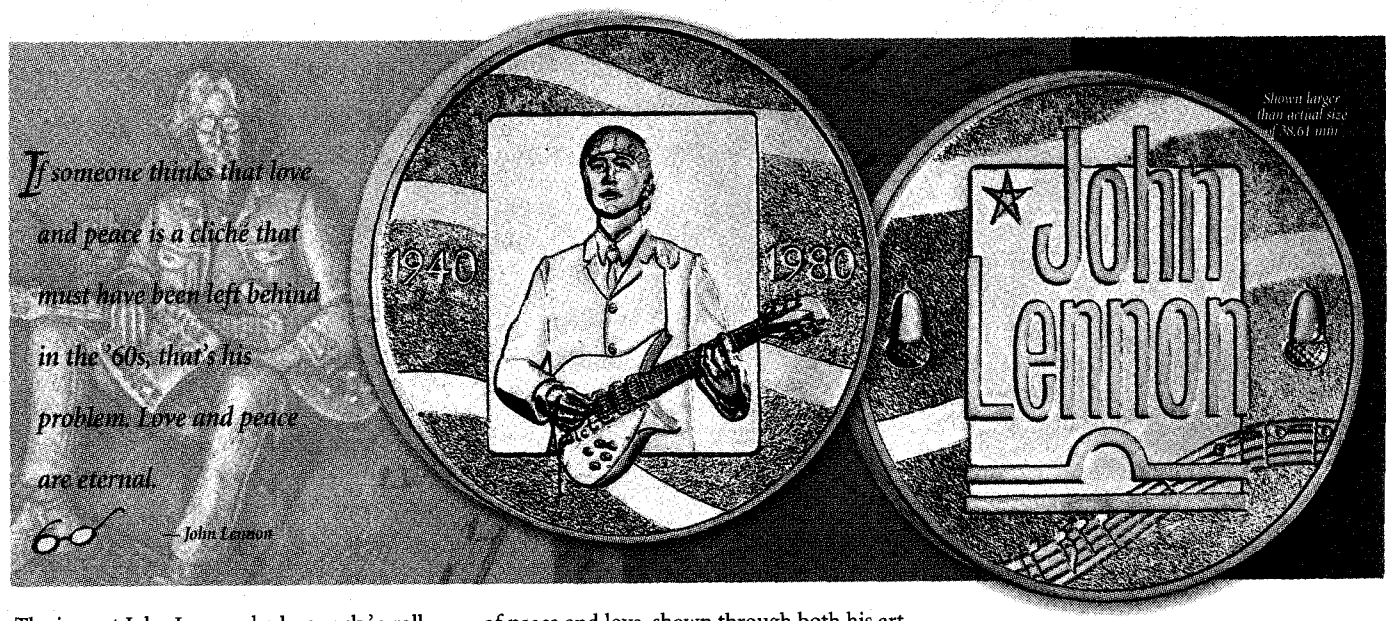
JOHN LENNON – THE LEGEND

His Life, Music and Legacy Touched the Soul of a Generation


If someone thinks that love and peace is a cliché that must have been left behind in the '60s, that's his problem. Love and peace are eternal.
— John Lennon
1940
1980
John Lennon
Shown larger than actual size of 38.61 mm

The impact John Lennon had on rock 'n roll cannot be overstated. Whether he was taking America by storm with the Beatles, working tirelessly for world peace or writing songs that spoke to the soul of a generation, Lennon lived his life committed to truth, peace and humanity. Now, on the 65th anniversary of his birth in Liverpool, England, the world-famous British Royal Mint with the approval of Yoko Ono, is paying tribute to John Lennon with a magnificent, limited-edition medallion.

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